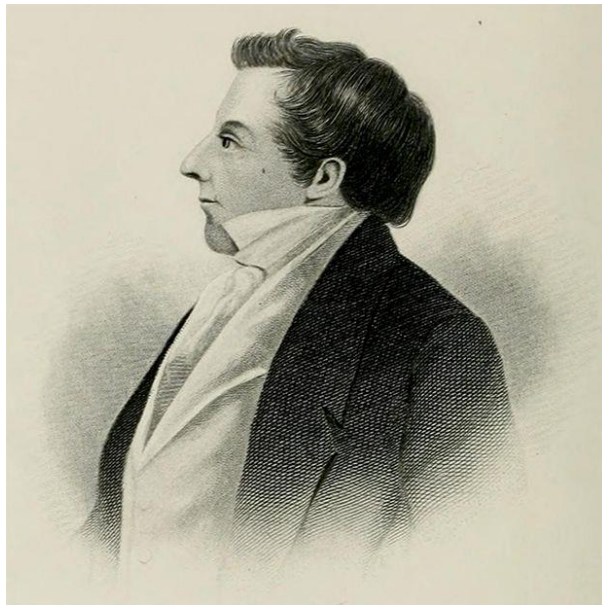




LIGHT AND TRUTH LETTER

My Search for More Light and Truth

AUSTIN FIFE



“Avoid contentions and vain disputes
with men of corrupt minds, who do
not desire to know the truth.”

JOSEPH SMITH JR.¹

In memory of E. Roland Brown

LIGHT AND TRUTH LETTER

MY SEARCH FOR MORE LIGHT AND TRUTH

AUSTIN FIFE
August 2024

INTRODUCTION

An Open Letter to the *CES Letter Foundation*, *Mormon Stories*, and other critics of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints:

In January of 2014, I lost my faith. I confessed to my wife that I no longer believed in God, much less a Church of Jesus Christ. The conversation hurt but was a long time coming. My loss of faith was gradual and then all at once. It felt like my whole world had turned upside down. It hurt. I felt confused and lost.

My wife's reaction surprised me; she did not panic or get defensive. Instead, she told me how excited she was for my faith journey. I thought I was leaving the Church, but she reframed what I was feeling as the start of a journey. Then she made me a promise: If I could find more light and truth outside the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, she would follow me. And she meant it.

It has been ten years. I have read the *CES Letter* several times and listened to many interviews on *Mormon Stories*. I spent countless hours hearing and reading from ex-Mormons and other critical Christians. I have learned a lot in my honest and exhaustive 10-year search. Over time, I felt unsettled about atheism or agnosticism, and I discovered things that forced me to reexamine my unbelief. As a result of my search for more light and truth, some questions troubled me.

The following issues are among my main concerns.

DISCLOSURES

During one six-month period in 2024, I collected most of the X (Twitter), Reddit, and other social media or forum-type comments quoted in this letter. Some comments have been hard to find again, or the original contributor removed them. I used brackets for clarity purposes without changing the intended meaning. Any particular comment is not important. I see the essence of every statement listed here almost daily on social media. My goal is not to make online commentators feel bad but to illustrate the arguments of critics of the Church online.

Throughout the letter, I use “The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints,” “The Church of Jesus Christ,” and “The Church” interchangeably. I define the Church like Elder D. Todd Christofferson does in his October 2015 general conference address, “[Why the Church](#).”

“Jesus organized His work in such a way that the gospel could be established simultaneously in multiple nations and among diverse peoples. That organization, the Church of Jesus Christ, was founded on ‘apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone.’” “The Lord reestablished the Church of Jesus Christ once again through the Prophet Joseph Smith. The ancient purpose remains: that is, to preach the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ and administer the ordinances of salvation—in other words, to bring people to Christ.”

I do not represent the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The thoughts, opinions, and questions in this letter are my own.

If you wish to contribute material or feedback to the Light and Truth Letter, please visit www.lightandtruthletter.org

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Manipulation and Fallacies

Questions & Concerns

“There is something fundamentally immoral to presenting a narrative that people build their entire lives upon. They decide what to do with their education, how much money to give, who to marry, when to marry, how many kids to have, what professions to pursue... There is this massive amount of decisions that you make, you know in a finite life, and to base that life on a narrative, when not only the narrative isn't what it claims to be, when leaders know the narrative isn't what it claims to be, and intentionally - for as long as they could - withheld the information that would allow people to make an informed decision about how they spend their finite time and resources –that's profoundly immoral.”²

- JOHN DEHLIN

“The past year was the worst year of my life. I experienced a betrayal, loss, and sadness unlike anything I've ever known. 'Do what is right; let the consequence follow' now holds a completely different meaning for me. I desperately searched for answers to all of the problems. To me, the answer eventually came but it was not what I expected...or hoped for.”³

- JEREMY RUNNELS

“The church is coming apart at the seams and we can all see it.”

- X (TWITTER) USER

“Why I left but don't leave it alone: The Mormon religion is false. It's made up. It's based on a con man's lies that destroys families & harms people with its lies. Of course I'm going to help people get out.”⁴

- X (TWITTER) USER

I grew up in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. I was baptized at 8, a missionary at 19, and married at 22. I graduated from Brigham Young University at 23. I am a right-down-the-middle average member of the Church. I served in various callings from several wards and stakes across the US. I never planned to have a faith crisis. Most people who know me are surprised to hear that I seriously considered leaving the Church. In the ten years since I first admitted that I did not believe in God, I've seen other members leave the fold. Whenever I saw a social media post from a friend or family member outlining their decision to remove their names from the records of the Church, it felt uncomfortable. The natural question would always surface: **"What do they know that I don't?"**

Initially, during my faith crisis in 2014, I identified with the Church's critics. I felt like we were a like-minded group of enlightened non-believers. My experience in the Church had been so positive that even when my doubts deepened, I was convinced that the Church was a force for good in the world. Gradually, that changed. **I started to believe the critics.** The more I heard from disillusioned members, the more I felt like maybe I was wrong about the Church of Jesus Christ. Perhaps the Church is much worse than I ever realized.

I was ready to leave, but there was a problem. I am not sure when it happened, but eventually, I started noticing a long list of techniques being employed against me by critics of the Church. I could begin to see that I was being **tricked into accepting false premises and half-truths.** That is when I developed serious concerns about how critics made their case.

Below is a list of tactics and fallacies⁵ I have identified over the years that many critics of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints use and why each is manipulative or wrong.

Manipulation Tactic	Example	Why it is manipulative
Distrust in authority Assuming that any institutional structure with a hierarchy is up to no good.	"If the Church donated that money, it must have been for nefarious reasons." The attitude that anything positive the Church does must have had sinister motives.	This is designed to make the target distrust church leaders. The manipulator wins if the target believes they cannot trust the Church.
Myth of Infallibility An assumption that church leaders are infallible.	Any quote or policy from church leaders in the past that does not align with what we practice or believe today.	It assumes something the restoration never does. Namely, God's servants should be near perfect and not succumb to popular false teachings. The formula for critics is easy. 1). Assume church leaders are infallible 2). Show an example of fallibility.

Manipulation Tactic	Example	Why it's manipulative
<p>False Compromise</p> <p>Presenting opposed narratives and then assuming, "Well, the truth must lie between these two extremes."</p>	<p>"Joseph Smith said he translated the golden plates with the gift and power of God. However, he was just a treasure-seeking, peep-stone-looking fraud."</p>	<p>Critics do not need their target to agree with their view. They only need the victim to reject the traditional narrative. The middle ground between truth and lies is not where the truth is.</p>
<p>The Big List (Gish Gallop or Proof by Verbosity)</p> <p>An illusion of proof by the sheer mass of material provided.</p>	<p>The CES Letter. It culminates the critiques of the Church of Jesus Christ's truth claims.</p>	<p>Overwhelm the reader or listener. Critics who use the big list tactic want to create the illusion that even if one concern has an answer, there are 100 more. It is the hydra of manipulation strategies.</p>
<p>Half Truth</p> <p>Mixing truth with deceit to confuse the issue.</p>	<p>The <i>CES Letter</i> seeks to explain how Joseph Smith came up with so many unique place names in the Book of Mormon. A table lists place names and potential candidates in and around upstate New York. The idea is not a half-truth; it is more like a tenth truth. Most modern cities on the list did not exist until after the publication of the Book of Mormon.</p>	<p>A half-truth is still a lie at its core. It is more destructive than a lie because a half-truth requires untangling the lie from the truth.</p>
<p>Presentism</p> <p>Assuming historical figures see the world in the same way that a person would today. Judging the past based on today's standards.</p>	<p>Church leaders phased in the word of wisdom from its 1833 introduction to 1921. That was when it became required for a temple recommend. Critics point out that early church leaders did not adhere to the Word of Wisdom as we know it today.</p>	<p>Judging people in the past based on today's standards is popular but misleading. Imagine getting speeding tickets for driving 35 mph in a 25 mph zone in your neighborhood—except that the speed limit was only recently changed from 35 mph to 25 mph.⁶ If critics lived at the same time as the people they criticize, they would believe and act similarly (or worse). Anything from 200 years ago seems weird without historical and cultural context.</p>
<p>Quote Mining</p> <p>Mining for unflattering quotes made in the past.</p>	<p>A meme on social media by a critic⁷ - "My wife has borne to me fifteen children. Anything short of this would have been less than her duty and privilege." - George F. Richards, Relief Society Magazine, July 1916.</p>	<p>It is disingenuous. Scouring a target's social media feeds to find anything damaging is similar. Often, these quotes lack context or fall into the "presentism" category.</p>

Manipulation Tactic	Example	Why it's manipulative
Meat before Milk Presenting complicated issues without first establishing the fundamental building blocks for understanding.	<p>"Mormons believe they will all have their own planet."</p> <p>"Mormons believe that only they will get into heaven."</p>	<p>Critics who use this tactic either 1). Do not understand the issue, or more likely, 2). Understand it, but know that jumping to the conclusion first will lead people to avoid engaging the Church's sincere claims.</p>
Naturalist Assumptions Assuming no supernatural or spiritual forces are at play in the universe.	<p>"Angels don't appear to men to give them golden plates."</p>	<p>Critics who have naturalist assumptions are close-minded by definition. They are limited in their pursuit of truth. Eliminating supernatural forces from the universe closes off an entire dimension of truth.</p>
Bully on the Playground Use of mockery and name-calling .	<p>"Oh, he is just a TBM ('True Believing Mormon')."</p> <p>"You're in a cult."</p>	<p>Critics attempt to manipulate people into accepting their worldviews by name-calling or labeling. No one wants to hear that what they are doing is weird. This method is effective, especially if someone is unsure of their convictions.</p>

Fallacy	Example	Why it's wrong
Straw Man Set up the opponent's argument to be weaker than it is. Then, proceed to demolish the false, weak version and claim victory.	<p>"Mormons believe you need magic underwear to get into heaven. We believe you need Jesus."</p>	<p>It is dishonest because it does not genuinely engage with the opposing party's arguments. It may win points for the "home team" of like-minded people, but it does not bring anyone closer to the truth.</p>
Ad Hominem Attacking the person instead of their arguments.	<p>"John is a Latter-day Saint. We should not invite him to this equality debate because Mormons are bigots."</p>	<p>Does not address the issue or lead to any understanding.</p>
Hasty Generalization An inference is drawn from insufficient evidence. Leaping to a conclusion.	<p>"The Church's affiliated investment manager, Ensign Peak, was fined \$5 million for insufficient reporting of securities owned. So, the Church is sketchy."</p>	<p>We all tend to take lazy shortcuts when we encounter new information. It is easier to write something off than to engage with the issue. One or two more insights may address the concern.</p>

Fallacy	Example	Why it's Wrong
<p>Red Herrings</p> <p>Using an unrelated issue to distract attention away from the relevant question. "Whataboutism" used by political pundits is a form of using a red herring.</p>	<p>"The Church focuses on moral issues? That's rich considering its roots in polygamy!"</p>	<p>Distracts attention away from the issues raised without addressing them.</p>
<p>Poisoning the Well (or Bulverism)</p> <p>Attempts to discredit a person before their arguments are even heard.</p>	<p>"Oh, you can't read anything a BYU scholar says because they're on the Church's payroll!"</p>	<p>Critics hope their target will not engage in the information that may answer important questions.</p>
<p>Double Standard</p> <p>Treating two or more people or circumstances differently even though they should be treated the same.</p>	<p>When Christians say, "If the golden plates are real, then where are they?" Atheists use the same logic for the Ten Commandments written on stone tablets. "The Book of Mormon witnesses are unreliable. They were Joseph Smith's friends and family." That logic can be applied to the witnesses of Christ's resurrection.</p>	<p>This shows that the critic is being internally inconsistent. They use an argument when it is convenient for them without applying it equally to other situations, including those that would reflect poorly on their position.</p>
<p>Appeal to Authority</p> <p>Claiming that something must be true (or false) because it is believed (or not) by someone who is said to be an authority on the subject.</p>	<p>"There is no archaeological evidence for the Book of Mormon in the Americas."</p> <p>Black-and-white statements from an unknown expert. These usually start with "there is no evidence" and explain why some aspect of the Book of Mormon is false.</p>	<p>We are naturally inclined to believe an expert. Faith crisis victims do not have the time to be expert archeologists, historians, chemists, linguists, lawyers, doctors, and authors. It is easier to trust an expert. Critics rely on our belief in experts to make bad arguments. The "authority" of the source referenced may be unreliable. Note that actual authorities rarely speak in black-and-white terms.</p>
<p>Bandwagon</p> <p>Claiming something to be true because "most people believe it."</p>	<p>"Most Christians believe that the Bible canon is closed, so it must be so."</p>	<p>This fallacy preys on the tendency to want to follow the crowd. Advertisers and salespeople use this tactic all the time.</p>

Fallacy	Example	Why it's wrong
<p>Appeal to Emotion</p> <p>Seeking to win an argument through the manipulation of emotions. Especially in the absence of evidence.</p>	<p>"The Mormon Church is a bigoted cult! It hates the LGBTQ community and destroys people's lives!"</p>	<p>Critics will use inflammatory or prejudicial language to influence their target. When someone speaks passionately, we want to believe that they are telling the truth.</p>
<p>The False Dilemma or Dichotomy (The "either-or" fallacy)</p> <p>Discussing an issue as if there are only two alternatives and no compromises.</p>	<p>"If you have sincere questions about the gospel, then your family will hate and abandon you."</p>	<p>Critics use this fallacy to create rifts between a questioning Latter-day Saint and their families and wards. In the example given, the critic is trying to create resentment toward the family and the ward, leading to a self-fulfilling prophecy.</p>
<p>Begging the Question - False Premise</p> <p>Reaching a conclusion based on a premise that lacks support.</p>	<p>"The Church hid the fact that Joseph Smith used a seer stone in the translation process. Thus, the Church is immoral."</p>	<p>It subtly takes a giant leap in logic to influence the victim. The victim will likely agree with the conclusion if a false premise is assumed. Even if the target does not agree with the conclusion, the believed false premise itself can generate doubt.</p>
<p>Non-Sequitur</p> <p>A conclusion or statement that does not logically follow from the previous argument or statement. Non Sequitur is Latin for "it does not follow."</p>	<p>"Russell M. Nelson was a member of a college secret fraternity, 'Skull & Bones.' How is he God's prophet?"</p>	<p>A massive leap in logic from the opening statement to the conclusion. The end result is a conclusion that illogically flows from the underlying premise.</p>
<p>Argument from Ignorance</p> <p>Asserts that a proposition is true because it is not yet proven false. Alternatively, that silence is an admission of guilt.</p>	<p>Before metal plates with writing in ancient Israel were found, critics would say, "We've never seen ancient people write on metal plates. Therefore, the Book of Mormon is false."</p>	<p>Critics argue that something cannot be because they cannot imagine how it could be. This intellectual shortcut does not seriously consider the totality of the available evidence.</p>
<p>Slippery Slope</p> <p>Assuming catastrophic results from a premise.</p>	<p>"It is dangerous to accept the doctrine of personal revelation from God. Before you know it, we'll see criminals committing heinous acts claiming revelation from God."</p>	<p>It is a false idea meant to exploit the target's risk aversion.</p>

Fallacy	Example	Why it's wrong
<p>Questionable Cause (Correlation vs. Causation)</p> <p>Oversimplification. Presumes there is a single cause of a more complex phenomenon. It is often used to insinuate that a correlated variable is the cause of an outcome.</p>	<p>"Utah has a higher-than-average suicide rate. Thus, the LDS Church makes people depressed and suicidal."</p>	<p>In my experience, questionable cause is the primary type of data critics use (aside from personal stories). When the manipulator lacks evidence, his/her only corroboration is questionable correlations.</p>
<p>Texas Sharpshooter Fallacy</p> <p>This fallacy takes data out of its context and tries to make it appear more impressive than it is. The name of this fallacy comes from an example of a Texas gunslinger who shoots randomly at a barn door. Afterward, a target is painted around each bullet hole. The holes are random, but the painted targets appear to prove that the gunslinger is a great shot.</p>	<p>"View of the Hebrews and <i>The Late War</i> have some parallels with the Book of Mormon. So, that must have been the source for the Book of Mormon!"</p>	<p>To me, this is grasping at straws. Book of Mormon critics tend to compare loose parallels with other books and then exaggerate how they are "bullseyes" for the source of the Book of Mormon.</p>
<p>Shifting the Burden of Proof</p> <p>Making a claim that needs evidence, then shifting the responsibility for disproof of that claim to another party.</p>	<p>"Brigham Young conspired to get Joseph Smith killed. Prove that I'm wrong."</p>	<p>Critics point to weak, coincidental, and often contradictory connections, and then, in place of evidence, they shift the burden of proof back onto the Church or the believer.</p>
<p>Generalization</p> <p>A claim based on insufficient evidence. Drawing a conclusion about a large population using a small, unrepresentative sample.</p>	<p>"Local ward and stake leaders did not respond adequately enough to an instance of abuse. Therefore, the Church is abusive."</p>	<p>Claims of abuse in the Church or hostilities toward sexual or other minorities often fall into this category. Critics use anecdotal examples to prove an untrue conclusion.</p>

Referencing the *CES Letter* and other “doubt bombing” critical tactics, Manuel Padro, an anthropologist and former latter-day saint, commented (emphasis added):

“[The] tactic of intentionally luring Latter-day Saints into a situation where they are bombarded with questions they don't know how to answer is a documented tactic used by these groups ... and even before it was documented, it was clearly going on. ... When I was a kid, the Lighthouse Ministry and CARM (the Christian Apologetics and Research Ministry) were the two big groups using this strategy. Now Mormon Stories, the Life After Ministry, Mormonthink and a number of other groups are all relying on the same **abusive tactic**. They are trying to **coerce you** into a situation where they can bombard you with so many doubt-provoking questions that they can cause **your resolve to collapse** and your **identity to fall apart**. Inside of that vacuum, created by an act of psychological rape, they hope to impregnate you with their own belief system. ... **If that sounds abusive, it's because that's what it is**. It's an extension of the cultural legacy of the Inquisition. They can't torture you, but they can humiliate you and pressure you with questions you don't have an answer to yet. They try to hit you up with too many of these questions to answer because if they don't, it wouldn't work. **That's how the CES letter works.**”⁸

- Why do critics resort to these tactics?
- Can their critiques stand on their own without using inflammatory and abusive rhetoric?

The more I learned from critics, the more I saw the manipulative techniques being used against me. Once I started seeing it, **I couldn't unsee it**.

Building Up vs. Tearing Down

“*Any jackass can kick down a barn, but it takes a good carpenter to build one.*”

– SAM RAYBURN

The sheer hatred in the critical community alarmed me. I could not identify with that. **It never felt like we were building something**, only tearing down. I owed a lot to the Church, and even in my worst faith crisis moments, I felt gratitude for my upbringing. Not all critics become bitter, and I applaud those who are not. To be **united by hatred** is a quick and easy way to feel unity, **but it is temporary**. I could not imagine living my life identifying myself by what I am not (IE “Ex-Mormon”). I find so much more purpose in building up. Pessimists rarely build anything meaningful.

Above all, I was alarmed by the **critic's strategic use of distrust in family**. A faithful church member once had a child come to them and identify as LGBTQ+. The child said, “Are you going to kick me out of the house?” The bewildered father sat in stunned silence. What in the world had given his daughter that impression? What church or family home evening lesson gave that vulnerable child the idea that she would be ostracized if she identified as LGBTQ+? The answer is complex, but I cannot help but sense that critics bear some responsibility. Misguided critics imply to their targets that a doubter's family and the Church will abandon them. These **critics calculate the right things to say to influence**

the victim to see things in their ward and family members that **may not even be there**. They lead the victim into a **self-fulfilling prophecy**. In psychology, this is called “the personal expectancy effect,” and using this tactic is wrong.

Don't the critics realize that they can create the very thing that they warn us about?

“Jesus taught, ‘Seek, and ye shall find.’⁹ I believe this simple phrase is not only a spiritual promise; it is a statement of fact. **If we seek reasons to be angry, to doubt, to be bitter or alone, we will find them too.** However, if we seek joy—if we look for reasons to rejoice and to happily follow the Savior, we will find them. We rarely find something we are not looking for.

Are you looking for joy?”

- DIETER F. UCHTDORF ([A Higher Joy](#), April 2024 General Conference, emphasis added)

I have interacted with critics for years. Some are well-intentioned and believe they are doing the right thing. From others, I get the impression that **misery loves company**. It was not enough to leave. Their goal, mission, vision, and conquest is to tear down faith in God. To dismantle belief in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. At times, I felt like I was listening to someone with nothing more than a **personal vendetta to disparage the Church**. I am sure some of these folks feel genuinely wronged by the Church of Jesus Christ, and I'm sorry they feel that way. Regardless of their personal grievances, my mission is to find more light and truth.

Some critics, like **John Dehlin** from *Mormon Stories*, provide **coaching** services for people who have left the Church to help them handle the trauma of leaving their church community. Is that a **conflict of interest**?

→ Is it right for a critic to **actively influence a victim into a faith crisis** and **then charge for groups and counseling sessions** for handling the crisis?

I have seen many disillusioned former church members share their faith deconstruction stories. Some are emotional messes after their crisis. I wish the best for those folks. I hope they find the peace that they seek. I find it **deeply immoral for critics to share half-truths and false narratives** with the intent of convincing their victims to turn their lives upside down in a faith crisis. This mortal existence is finite, and eternities are forever; the stakes could not be any higher.

Update: In recent years, critics of the Church have deemphasized how much happier they are since leaving the Church in favor of a narrative emphasizing how hard it is to leave. This is likely intentional to convince their targets that exiting the Church is the hard thing but the right thing to do. It may also help resolve some cognitive dissonance in leaving. The reality is that while it may initially be challenging to abandon a belief system, it takes deep discipline over a lifetime to be a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ. A few months or years of faith deconstruction does not outweigh the lifelong service of selfless sacrifice to God and mankind.

To be an atheist is to be culturally relevant and celebrated. Atheists are not bullied at the university or places of employment for their beliefs. To be a believer is to move against the cultural current of skepticism. Following Christ is hard to do—it always has been.

The Internet

The *CES Letter* lambasts the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints for encouraging members to use [divinely appointed sources](#) when researching challenging gospel questions. I admit that this advice from church leaders bothered me for some time. Was I to only look at the Church's approved list of reading material? It felt suspicious to me. Then I learned why the Church's invitation to use divinely appointed resources is more reasonable than I gave it credit for.

The internet is a great place to find out when Taco Bell closes. But ask Google which political party to vote for? Should I be pro-choice or pro-life? How about pro-Palestine or pro-Israel? Is the Mormon Church a cult? Yikes. **Anything remotely controversial on the internet is a mess of disinformation and propaganda.**

False news online travels six times faster than the truth, according to a 2018 study by researchers from MIT.¹⁰ A lie online is clean and short. The truth has depth and takes time to understand. According to the non-scientific internet adage of Brandolini's law, the **"amount of energy needed to refute [BS] is an order of magnitude bigger than that needed to produce it."**¹¹

Short, quick, and easy-to-understand answers are the most appealing at first glance. More so with the advent of social media. When confronted with challenging and unflattering information, it is tempting to accept it. At times, it felt easier for me to say that the Church was lying and that Joseph Smith was a fraud. **Knowing the whole story would take too much effort.** When I realized this, I started to see how manipulative critics of the Church can be with their use of the internet. They want to capitalize on the natural tendency to want **simple answers with little work.**

Bruce and Marie Hafen elaborate on this problem in their book *Faith is Not Blind*. They share a story about a bishop who meets with ward members who have been rattled by a phrase or story taken out of context or by some event or statement they do not understand in Church history.¹²

"They lack the experience to sense the need for more context; or they don't know how to find the context; or, despite feeling shattered, they still sometimes don't care enough to look for it. **Their problem is not that they know too much about Church history, but that they don't know nearly enough.** And they have been conditioned by the oversimplifications of social media to expect a short answer to any question. They often **aren't interested in a long answer to anything** – even if the true, complete story is very complex." (emphasis added)

I was (and in some way still am) one of these members. I did not know nearly enough, even after engaging with critics of the Church for years. Part of the problem is that I have a job and a family. **Who has the time, resources, and capacity to become a historian and scholar overnight? That's the trick.** I could feel critics egging me on to **shift the burden of proof onto the Church.** All the critic has done is share a half-truth with a negative implication. This tactic has a **dark motive** and is very effective for **propagandists.** Over

time, I found that the negative narratives spun by critics almost always had a good answer. **All I had to do was learn more.**

“The first gulp from the glass of natural sciences will turn you into an atheist, but at the bottom of the glass, God is waiting for you.” - Theoretical physicist WERNER HEISENBERG

“A little learning is a dangerous thing; drink deep, or taste not the Pierian spring: there shallow draughts intoxicate the brain, and drinking largely sobers us again.” - ALEXANDER POPE (“An Essay on Criticism,” 1709)

“A little philosophy inclineth man’s mind to atheism; but depth in philosophy bringeth men’s minds about to religion.” - FRANCIS BACON (“Of Atheism,” 1601).

I have learned that the information **is not the problem**. The real issue is in the **interpretation**. Critics tried to convince me that they only shared what the Church did not want me to know. When examined carefully, I realized that most everything “new” the critics shared was relatively innocuous or came from church sources. Ultimately, the **manipulation happens in the presentation of data and history**, not the data and history itself.

Illusions and Mirages

“Family. Isn’t it about... time to recognize how Church ruins them?”

- X (Twitter) comment

“I left because I finally acknowledged what the church is: an American corporation that hoards wealth and actively harms people who have committed themselves to the faith. It offers empty promises in return for ‘all with which you may be blessed.’ It divides families while giving lip service to the ‘sanctity of the family.’ ... It protects abusers and tramples victims.”

- X (Twitter) comment

→ What church are these folks referring to?

The church described by the former members quoted above sounds awful. I do not want to minimize anyone’s lived experience, but with all due respect, **the church described by critics is not the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints**. I grew up in the Church and have attended several stakes and wards across various US regions and abroad. I’ve received help and resources and likewise given help and resources to help those in need.

The Church does countless good around the world for individuals, families, and communities. Charity and humanitarian efforts are done with little fanfare and genuinely help the people intended (See “Welfare Program of the Church” under the “Church Finances” section). Marriages and families tied to the Church are incredibly resilient (see “Fruits of the Church” section). Church members are better off by virtually every meaningful measure (see “Fruits of the Church” section).

If I am honest with myself, I must acknowledge that the Church gave me a mission, identity, purpose, light, and truth. Even at my lowest spiritual point, I could not deny that **almost everything good in my life was thanks to the Church**. Without my upbringing in the Church of Jesus Christ, I am convinced my life would have turned out for the worse, and **I was not naive enough to believe otherwise**.

I get the impression that many critics had or heard of a one-off, personal bad experience with the Church. From there, it is easy to create a made-up church of evil-doers. No matter how much the critics want it to be so, **the church they imagined may not be real**.

I’m further distressed when some critics accuse the Church of the very thing that they are doing. This is an **accusation in the mirror**. Critics tell me how intrusive it is for Church leaders to discuss the temple garment. Do you know what the reality is? **Critics talk far more about my underwear than any church leader ever has**. They cannot have it both ways. It is the same story when critics falsely state that the Church is tearing families apart. If a critic has left the Church of Jesus Christ and that tension created a rift in their family, I am sorry that happened. In the same breath, that rift is **not the Church’s fault**.

The Mormon Stories Formula

During my faith journey, I listened to *Mormon Stories*, the largest and most well-known podcast critical to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The podcast is operated by former member John Dehlin. In defense of the Church, some well-meaning members use personal attacks to undermine John’s show and cast him in a negative light. For my part, I believe that John thinks what he is doing is right. He is behaving in a way that is logical if someone believes the Church is an evil organization that does more harm than good. John makes his lack of divine worldview clear. “Angels do not give golden plates to people” is a favorite phrase of his.

I eventually stopped listening to *Mormon Stories* when **I caught on to the formula**. The show became **predictable**. Despite the hosts’ every effort to reassure the audience that they were not trying to convince me to leave the Church, I got the impression that I was not hearing “the true story” of early church events or modern problems. I was hearing the **critical, least generous narratives of church issues** from a handful of disillusioned members of the Church.

This strategy can be used to smear any organization. It would be like John starting a channel called **Costco Stories**. He gives some backstory on the beginnings of the store chain and includes some dirt on the founders. He highlights products that use the least ethical production methods and makes it sound like these problems are unique to Costco. He brings on tearful guests who have had bad experiences shopping at Costco, poor customer service, no return when returns are guaranteed, unfair sample distribution, and a rotisserie chicken incident. They expound on the burden of buying in bulk and how the \$1.50 hotdog/drink combo is the leading cause of obesity in the US. Podcast episodes are shared in an understanding tone, with a seemingly honest telling of actual experiences. After listening for a month or so, the listener decides to shop elsewhere. **The impressionable listener cannot put their finger on it, but they now believe Costco is bad for the community and their pantry.** Amazingly, they believe that Costco is bad, even if their own personal experience is nothing like what they heard.

Perhaps some of what is shared on John's podcast is true, but the tainted, critical narrative felt disingenuous. So, I stopped listening. In my mission for more light and truth, I had to move on.

The Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon

Questions & Concerns

“How can super intelligent professionals and others who are members of the Mormon church persist in believing in [the Book of Mormon]? The evidence proving Joseph Smith was a fraud and the Mormon Church is not what it claims is overwhelming and even simple. The Book of Mormon is so full of holes from anachronisms, being out of sync with later doctrine, no historicity, etc. The Book of Mormon is the worst evidence in favor of the Church because it is so easily discredited. But, these incredibly smart people testify that it is true.”³ - Reddit user

“The totality of evidence against the Book of Mormon suggests it is false beyond any reasonable doubt.”⁴ - Reddit user

[The Smiths] *“were poorly educated, ignorant, and superstitious.”* – ABLE CHASE (1881)¹⁵

“We had a great deal of trouble with it. It was not punctuated at all. They [Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery] did not know anything about punctuation.” When asked: *“Was he [Joseph Smith] educated?”* he responded: *“Oh, not at all then.”* – JOHN H. GILBERT (the typesetter of the Book of Mormon)¹⁶

Where did the Book of Mormon come from?

The Book of Mormon haunted me when I attempted to leave the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. No matter how hard I tried, I could not develop a working naturalistic theory explaining the Book of Mormon that made sense. There is a large, divine-sized gap between Joseph Smith in 1829 and the Book of Mormon. **Any theory asserted by critics only brought up more questions.**

→ Who wrote the Book of Mormon?

Joseph Smith was a poor farm boy from upstate New York with a limited frontier education. Until the Book of Mormon, he had never written a book or demonstrated a knack for long dictation. When the original manuscript was finished in the summer of 1829, Joseph was 23 years old. **Critics attempt to explain the Book of Mormon with far-fetched and contradictory claims.**

→ If not by divine means, **how did Joseph Smith come up with the Book of Mormon?** If it wasn't from God or Joseph, then where did it come from? **Who wrote it?**

Historians concede that [Joseph Smith had metal plates](#).¹⁷ Where did he get them from? How could he afford the gold or brass or lead to “make” the plates? Could he have assembled them with no experience in metallurgy? Why are there no witnesses to him fabricating plates?

→ If someone else wrote the Book of Mormon, why did no one come forward?

Sidney Rigdon was an educated preacher and an early church leader. Critics sometimes say that he wrote the Book of Mormon or provided material for it. If that is true, **how was he converted in November 1830 by the book “he wrote” in 1829?** Then, he never took credit for it?

Others claim that **Oliver Cowdery** wrote or gave Joseph Smith ideas about the Book of Mormon. If that is true, **why did he never admit it?** Wasn't he [estranged from Joseph Smith and the Church for years](#)?¹⁸

→ If Joseph Smith used other sources, why did he have [nothing else with him during the translation process](#)?¹⁹

Source Claims for the Book of Mormon

The Book of Mormon translation was completed at the end of June 1829 and published in Palmyra, New York, in March 1830. Critics believe Joseph Smith wrote the Book of Mormon himself or plagiarized someone else. The Church teaches that the Book of Mormon is an ancient record from dozens of authors written over a 1,000-year period.

→ If Joseph wrote the Book of Mormon, how did he dictate a **complicated 580-page, 269,320-word religious book with a compelling narrative, consistent geography, and brilliant lectures/sermons/allegories/poetic structures** in less than three months?

Joseph Smith was **not formally educated** beyond basic primary education in reading, writing, and math. He had **no documented experience writing books** and was **not known to be a prolific reader**. He had **no formal preaching experience** and was **not well-traveled**. He had **limited life experience** beyond the hardship of planting and harvesting crops. How could Joseph create a work like the Book of Mormon?

In the **173 public Nauvoo discourses**, **Joseph Smith only referenced two Book of Mormon scriptures, whereas dozens of biblical scriptures were quoted**.²⁰ Joseph seems unacquainted with the Book of Mormon, especially compared to the Bible.

- If Joseph Smith is the author of the Book of Mormon himself, **why is he so unfamiliar with it compared to the Bible?**
- How did Joseph Smith **dictate the Book of Mormon in 65 (or perhaps 90) days**²¹ in one draft with his limited experience and education?²²
- How did Joseph Smith create a complex narrative with **consistent geography within the book**?²³ There are 100 unique names of places in the Book of Mormon. It contains around **600 references to place names**. The distances, relative locations, and topography are **consistent throughout the text**. Other authors like JRR Tolkien have sprawling geographies, but how did Joseph Smith do it in 65 days?

Other prolific authors have written fictional stories and characters, whereas the Book of Mormon purports to be a historical, not fiction, book. **If Joseph Smith is making up the Book of Mormon**, why are so many of its **claims proving more true as time goes on**? If the Book of Mormon comes from the imagination of a 23-year-old farm boy, how have **millions of members** been touched by it and joined the Church?

- Some authors have written short books quickly. **How many uneducated and inexperienced authors have written something close to 269,320 words in one draft in less than three months?** Is there any example of a feat remotely close to what critics say Joseph Smith did?

Critics write off the “one draft” argument by pointing out the approximately 4000 authorized changes made in the 1837 and 1840 editions of the Book of Mormon, compared to the 1830 edition.²⁴ Weren’t the vast majority of the changes **typographical** in nature? The changes were for the purpose of aligning the printer’s manuscript with the original translation, correcting spelling, or clarifying the intended meaning. Sentence structures and order were unchanged, and no more than 4-5 words were changed in any given passage. Isn’t that feat incredibly impressive for an inexperienced, uneducated, and unknown farmer in upstate New York in the 1830s?

Could Joseph Smith have written or dictated the Book of Mormon by using another, non-divine source? If critics answer “yes,” then they **are burdened with developing a working theory for where it came from**. The most common candidates are the *Spaulding Manuscript*, *View of the Hebrews*, the *Late War*, *The First Book of Napoleon*, and the Bible.

The Spaulding Manuscript

In **early church history, critics of the Church gave no credence to Joseph Smith's intelligence.** They **presumed someone else wrote the Book of Mormon.** The most common source proposed was a lost manuscript by then-deceased Reverend Solomon Spaulding.

Initially, there were no copies of the manuscript to compare to the Book of Mormon. Years later, affidavits by critics said that Sidney Rigdon gave Joseph Smith *the Spaulding Manuscript, and it was the primary inspiration for the Book of Mormon.*²⁵ A manuscript was finally found years later and published in 1885. It was apparent then and now that **the Book of Mormon and the Spaulding Manuscript have virtually nothing in common.** *Manuscript Found*²⁶ or the *Spaulding Manuscript*, is a draft of a pseudo-pirate romance novel about Romans. I have read the manuscript. Any **similarity is general and superficial.** Plus, the manuscript is *considerably shorter than the Book of Mormon.*²⁷

→ Why do many critics still reference the *Spaulding Manuscript* as a source for the Book of Mormon? Why talk about a claim that has been **debunked since 1886?**

Why do critics still maintain that there must be a missing "2nd manuscript"? What are the odds that the mysterious (likely non-existent) second manuscript is the Book of Mormon? If the first draft was pirate romance fiction, what are the chances that the second draft is the Book of Mormon?

Why does the *CES Letter* omit the *Spaulding Manuscript* theory? Isn't the *Spaulding Manuscript* source theory among the most widely believed critical theories since the publication of the Book of Mormon?

→ **Is there any evidence at all** that Joseph Smith used the *Spaulding Manuscript*? Do we have an eyewitness who saw Joseph using that book? Did he have a copy? Did anyone he knew have a copy?

→ Why did **the Church of Jesus Christ publish the Spaulding Manuscript** if it was a source for the Book of Mormon?²⁸

Update: Critics labeled the Book of Mormon as heretical gibberish immediately after publication. However, critics had to change tactics once people started reading it, and thousands converted to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Dismissing Joseph Smith as a fool bolstered the Book of Mormon's claim of divine origin. In the first major anti-Mormon book, *Mormonism Unveiled* (1834), Eber Howe explains the Book of Mormon's sophistication by claiming that the lost *Spaulding Manuscript* was the source. This theory dominated critical circles for decades as it maintained the ignoramus, treasure-seeking Joseph narrative while still explaining the Book of Mormon. Critics held on to that narrative until the publication of the manuscript in 1885.

View of the Hebrews

Seventy-two years after the Book of Mormon was published, I. Woodbridge Riley (1902) was the first person to theorize that the *View of the Hebrews* was a source for it.²⁹

- **Why did none of the critics that were contemporary to the publication of the Book of Mormon think of the *View of the Hebrews* as a source?** Wasn't the *View of the Hebrews* widely available in 1830?³⁰ None of the eager early church critics put two and two together?

View of the Hebrews was published in Poultney, Vermont, in 1823 and 1825. The Book of Mormon was published in Palmyra, New York, in 1830. Why does the **CES Letter falsely relay that the Book of Mormon was published in Sharon, Vermont** (a county neighboring Poultney, Vermont), despite its publication being **300 miles away in Palmyra, New York?**³¹

The *CES Letter* insinuates, without evidence, that Oliver Cowdery used the *View of the Hebrews* as source material for the Book of Mormon.

*"This direct link between Joseph and Oliver and View of the Hebrews demonstrates that Joseph is very likely to have been aware of the theme and content of that book."*³²

- CES LETTER, section on the *View of the Hebrews*

- If this scenario is correct, **how do critics explain the lost 116 pages of the Book of Mormon?** Wasn't that dictated in 1828, **months before Joseph Smith met Oliver Cowdery?**

Joseph Smith met Oliver Cowdery for the first time on April 5th, 1829.³³ Oliver Cowdery was Joseph Smith's primary scribe during the translation of the Book of Mormon from **April 7th 1829**, to the last week of June 1829, when the dictation was completed.

Did Oliver Cowdery have a vast knowledge of the *View of the Hebrews*? **How did Joseph Smith convince Oliver Cowdery in three days** to use what Oliver knew about the *View of the Hebrews* to help him make up the Book of Mormon? **Is there any evidence** that Oliver Cowdery had read or had a copy of the *View of the Hebrews*? Is there any evidence that Joseph had other materials with him during the translation?

Parallels shown side by side can **seem compelling**. Such is the case with the Book of Mormon and the *View of the Hebrews*. Critics use expressive language like "striking parallels" to drive home the point. There seem to be around 26 possible parallels between the two books. How strong of a correlation is that in a 269,320-word book?

- **Are parallels convincing evidence?** If so, do critics give credence to the Book of Mormon for its 35 parallels with the ancient Dead Sea Scrolls **found 100 years after the publication of the Book of Mormon?**³⁴

At first, looking at an official-looking table of parallels seemed convincing. Then, as I started reading the *View of the Hebrews*, the matches characterized as "bullseyes" looked more like a stretch.

- If the *View of the Hebrews* was a major source for the Book of Mormon, why did no one notice the loose parallels between them until 1902? Among the people who did not notice

the connections was the *View of the Hebrews* author Ethan Hill, who was alive for 19 years after the publication of the Book of Mormon.

The reality is that any **parallels with the *View of the Hebrews* are tenuous at best**. High-level parallels are not a source. [Many of the "parallels" are not parallels once they are thoroughly examined](#).³⁵

Both speak of...	View of the Hebrews	Book of Mormon
...the destruction of Jerusalem...	...by the Romans in A.D. 70.	...by the Babylonians in 586 B.C.
...Israelites coming to the American continent...	...via dry land across the Bering Strait.	...via the ocean on board a ship.
...colonists spread out to fill the entire land...	...from the North to the South.	...from the South to the North.
...a great lawgiver (whom some assume to be associated with the legend of Quetzalcoatl)who is identified as Moses.	...who is identified as Jesus Christ.
...an ancient book preserved for a long time and then buried...	...because they had lost the knowledge of reading it, and it would be of no further use to them.	... to preserve the writings of prophets for future generations.
...a buried book taken from the earth...	...in the form of four dark yellow, folded leaves of old parchment.	...in the form of a set of gold metal plates.
...the Egyptian language since	...an Egyptian influence is present in hieroglyphic paintings made by native Americans.	...a reformed Egyptian language was used to record a sacred history.

Some "parallels" between the Book of Mormon and View of the Hebrews are also parallels with the Bible as well:

The Book of Mormon	View of the Hebrews	The King James Bible
The Book of Mormon tells the story of inspired seers and prophets.	View of the Hebrews talks of Indian traditions that state that their fathers were able to foretell the future and control nature.	The Bible tells the story of inspired seers and prophets.
The Book of Mormon was translated using the Nephite interpreters, which consisted of two stones fastened to a breastplate and later using a seer stone, both of which were later referred to by the name "Urim and Thummim" three years after the translation was completed.	View of the Hebrews describes a breastplate with two white buttons fastened to it, resembling the Urim and Thummim.	The Bible describes the Urim and Thummim as being fastened to a breastplate (Exodus 28:30).

Why do critics still cite the *View of the Hebrews* as a source for the Book of Mormon?

→ The *View of the Hebrews* is around **57,000 words long**. If Joseph Smith used the *View of the Hebrews* as his primary source for the Book of Mormon, **where did the other 200,000 words come from?**

Is there any evidence that Joseph Smith used the *View of the Hebrews* as a source? **Do we have an eyewitness of Joseph using the book?** Did he have a copy of it? Did anyone else he knew have a copy of it? Do we have anyone in letters or journal entries mentioning him referencing it?

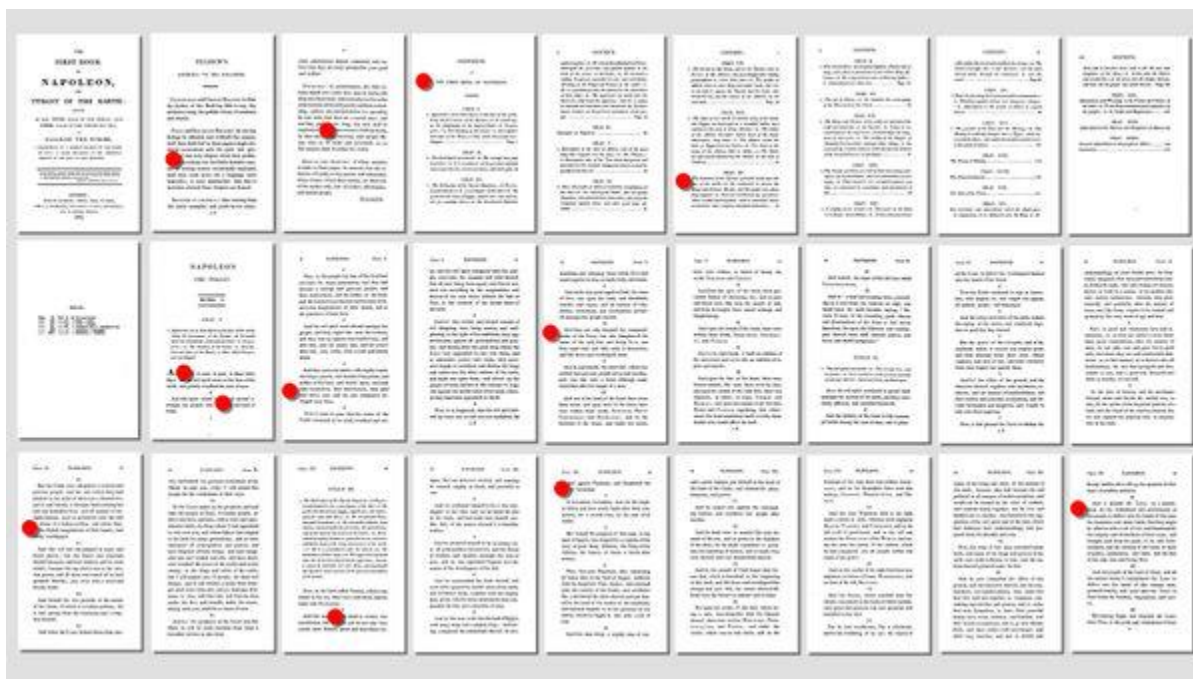
→ If Oliver Cowdery was involved, why didn't he admit it when he was estranged from Joseph Smith for years?

If *View of the Hebrews* was a source for Joseph, **why did the BYU re-publish and make it available for free to read online?**³⁶

The First Book of Napoleon

From the CES Letter (emphasis added) – “*The following is a side-by-side comparison of **selected phrases** the Book of Mormon is known for from the **beginning portion** of the Book of Mormon with the same order in the beginning portion of The First Book of Napoleon (note: these are not direct paragraphs).*”

The wording “selected phrases,” “known for,” and “from the beginning portion” are **suspicious**, right? Here is the critic's attempt to make the Book of Mormon and the *First Book of Napoleon* **seem** similar.



“Condemn not the [writing] ... **(skip a page)** an account...**(skip a page)** the *First Book of Napoleon* **(skip two pages)**... upon the face of the earth...**(skip four pages)** it came to pass... **(next paragraph)** the land...**(skip a page)** their inheritance, their gold and silver... **(skip two pages)** the commandments of the Lord... **(skip five pages)** the foolish imaginations of their hearts... **(skip two pages)** small in stature... **(skip two pages)** Jerusalem... **(skip four pages)** the wickedness and perverseness of the people”

With all due respect, what?

→ Why do Jeremy Runnells and other critics claim that the beginning of the *First Book of Napoleon* is similar to the start of the Book of Mormon? Doesn't the critic need to use **words and phrases** from **25 different pages in the *First Book of Napoleon*** and **several from the Book of Mormon to make them look similar?**³⁷ **Isn't that connection dishonest?** Why include it in the *CES Letter*?

→ If I can select words and phrases from dozens of pages, **couldn't I make almost any two books seem similar with this logic?**

Isn't the *First Book of Napoleon* a quasi-biblical work that describes the French Revolution and Napoleon Bonaparte's rise to power? Isn't Napoleon the central figure of the *First Book of Napoleon*, whereas Christ is the central figure of the Book of Mormon? Aren't the themes radically different?

Did any contemporaries of Joseph Smith notice the parallels between the *First Book of Napoleon* and the Book of Mormon? Why not?

The ***First Book of Napoleon* has around 22,500 words**. If Joseph Smith used the *First Book of Napoleon* as a primary source, **where did the other 230,000 words of the Book of Mormon come from?**

→ **Is there any evidence** that Joseph Smith used the *First Book of Napoleon* as a source? Do we have an eyewitness of Joseph using that book? Did he even have a copy of it? Did anyone else he knew have a copy of it? Do we have anyone in letters or journal entries mentioning him referencing it?

The Late War

In 2013, Chris and Duane Johnson presented results from a breakdown comparing the Book of Mormon with 100,000+ books. Computing power allows for this sort of analysis to happen in modern days. They found that the book most correlated with the Book of Mormon was a textbook published in 1819 called *The Late War*.³⁸ The textbook uses a scriptural writing style to describe the War of 1812. **Until 2013, no one had made this connection with the Book of Mormon, including anyone in Joseph Smith's day.**³⁹

The Johnsons' analysis showed 74 parallels between the books; how strong of a correlation is that in a 260,000-word book? Don't many of those correlations also correlate with the King James Version of the Bible?

→ Isn't it true that something else would have been **the most correlated** if not *the Late War*? **Why isn't *The View of the Hebrews*, *The First Book of Napoleon*, or the *Spaulding Manuscript* more correlated?**

Is there any proof that Joseph Smith had read *The Late War* or even had access to it?

Since 2014, after several debunkings, the Johnsons have not followed up on their study. Why?

***The Late War* has 56,632 words.** Where did the **other 200,000 words in the Book of Mormon** come from if Joseph Smith used *The Late War* as a source?

Is there evidence that Joseph Smith used *The Late War* as a source? Do we have an eyewitness of Joseph using the book? Did he even have a copy of it? Did anyone else he knew have a copy of it? Do we have anyone in letters or journal entries mentioning him referencing it?

→ **Is it reasonable to think that Joseph Smith used all these listed sources (and much more) from memory** to dictate the Book of Mormon in 65 days? Is there any proof that he used any of these sources? Has anyone ever mentioned seeing Joseph Smith using them or even having them? Were they in Joseph Smith's library? Did Joseph Smith ever reference these books in casual conversation at all?

The Bible

The Book of Mormon and the Bible have parallels for more obvious reasons. Depending on the method used, between **5% and 10%** of the Book of Mormon is from the Bible, or **15% at the very most**.⁴⁰

→ **Isn't more than 10% of the New Testament** a citation or allusion to an Old Testament scripture? Don't the biblical parallels make a better, not weaker, case for the Book of Mormon's divine origin?

If 5%-15% of the Book of Mormon is from the Bible, **where did the other 85%-95% come from?**

Is there any evidence that Joseph Smith referenced the Bible during the translation?

Update: To make all the naturalistic source theories work, critics must suspend belief and imagine Joseph Smith had memorized or memorialized a library of books. In Fawn Brodie's biography of Joseph Smith, *No Man Knows My History* (1945), she popularized the "Joseph was a religious genius" theory that is still prevalent today.

So, in a little over 100 years, critics went from Joseph being an **ignorant fool** to **someone else writing** the Book of Mormon to Joseph being a **religious genius**.

The Narrative of Zosimus

The *Narrative of Zosimus* is an ancient text written originally in Hebrew. It appears to be at least as old as the time of Christ and likely much older. Critics usually do not reference this text, but the **parallels to the story of Lehi** are striking.⁴¹

- The narrative explains how a group of sons, led by their father, escaped the destruction of Jerusalem at the time of Jeremiah
- The family survived the scattering of Israel
- They were led by God to an ideal land across the ocean
- Zosimus, dwelling in a cave in the desert, prays to the Lord and obtains spiritual passage to a land of blessedness
- Zosimus must wander in the wilderness without knowing where he is being led
- He attains his destination by constant prayer and divine intervention
- Zosimus arrives at the bank of an unfathomable river of water covered by an impenetrable cloud of darkness
- After crossing the water, Zosimus sits beneath a beautiful tree, eating its fruit
- Zosimus is met by an angelic escort, who asks him what he wants
- Zosimus is shown a vision in which he thinks he beholds the Son of God
- Their history is "engraved" upon soft stone plates.
- The family is allowed to occupy a land of paradise and abundance

Critics may not claim the *Narrative of Zosimus* as a source for the Book of Mormon, as its **first major English publication was not until 1867**. If critics claimed it to be a source, they would have to explain how Joseph got his hands on this ancient document decades before it was translated into English.

"Accounting for the similarities between these texts is intriguing and complicated. In a religious context, the parallels between the two writings may be explained as deriving from a common source of revelation or religious experience. Academically, the parallels are an intellectual challenge with no definite resolution. Even though I cannot account for these parallels in all respects, **their mere existence tends to support claims of ancient Near Eastern origins for Book of Mormon authorship.**" (emphasis added) - John Welch⁴²

Vernal Holley Model⁴³

In 1992, Vernal Holley theorized that Joseph Smith got the names and geography of the Book of Mormon by altering the names of cities/bodies of water in the Great Lakes area. Below are the two maps provided in the *CES Letter* (Vernal Holley maps). The insinuation is that Joseph Smith modified names and places from his surroundings. When I first saw these maps, I was unsure what to think. **At first glance, in a convincing-looking map, it seemed conclusive.**



Source: [Book of Mormon Authorship: A Closer Look](#), Vernal Holley

Here is the problem: **The whole thing is bogus.** According to the geography of the Book of Mormon, virtually everything in the Vernal Holley map is in the wrong place. Fair Latter-day Saints provides a thorough [debunking of the Vernal Holley map](#).⁴⁴ Below is my attempt to fix the map.



Morian-ton should be by the eastern seashore; Holley places it near the “sea west.” Ramah is the Jaredite name for the Hill Cumorah, yet Holley places it in Ontario, much further north than New York. Holley places Jacobugath in the land southward, while in the Book of Mormon, it is northward. Ogath in the Book of Mormon is south of Ripliancum, not east of it, as Holley’s map proposes. Angola should be north of Zarahemla, not south. Alma should be north of Lehi-Nephi, not far to the west. The list goes on. Worst of all, **many of Holley’s “parallels”** are locations in the Book of Mormon that are **only named once and not given a location**. Holley likely leans on Jaredite place names because their location is less clear than Nephite ones.

→ Why do critics use the Vernal Holley map when it is objectively wrong?

There are **86 place names in the Book of Mormon**. The Holley model theorizes that **28 of the names** were created by looking at a map and altering the names. Joseph would have needed to take names from five US states and two Canadian provinces, **hundreds of miles away** from the upstate New York farmer.

→ Aren’t some of the “parallels” a bit of a stretch? (IE Oneida is Onidah, Antioch is Ani-Anti, Monroe is Moroni, and Ripple Lake is Ripliancum)

Is it not true that other parallels are Biblical names like Jerusalem, Boaz, Midian, and Jordan?

→ Didn’t many of the 28 parallel cities **not appear on 1820-1830 maps**? Didn’t many of the parallel cities **not exist at all until after the publication of the Book of Mormon**?

Angola, New York, was established in **1854, twenty-four years after** the publication of the Book of Mormon.

Tecumseh did not have a name until **1912, eighty-two years after** 1830.

Alma was a small, unincorporated community in Tyler County, West Virginia. It **does not appear on the maps** Joseph would have used, and it was settled in the early 1830s.

Irish migrants named Conner, Canada, after the migrant's hometown in Ireland. The name came in **1865, thirty-five years after** the publication of the Book of Mormon.

Jacobsburg was established in 1815 but was too small to appear on maps. Its first appearance on a map of Ohio was in **1831, one year after** the publication of the Book of Mormon.

The Kiskimintas Township in Pennsylvania was named such in **1832, two years after** the publication of the Book of Mormon.

Mantua Village, Ohio, was incorporated in **1898, sixty-eight years after 1830**.

Monroe, New York, existed in 1830 but was **too small to appear on maps** of New York in 1822 or 1831.

Creation of Minoa was in 1895, **60 years after** the publication of the Book of Mormon.

→ Ripple Lake is already a stretch for the waters of Ripliancum. Even so, **it is so small that locating even on modern-day maps is challenging**. Plus, it is one of more than 250,000 lakes in Ontario. Did Joseph Smith like the name of a small and obscure body of water hundreds of miles away so much that **he kept the first three letters of "Ripple Lake," added seven letters, and called it Ripliancum?**

Here is a breakdown:

Potential names connected to the Book of Mormon	Existed in 1830
Sodom (Sidom)	✓
Ripple Lake (Ripliancum)	✓
Oneida (Onidah)	✓
Oneida Castle (Onidah, Hill)	✓
Moraviantown (Morian-ton)	✓
Lehigh (Lehi)	✓
Hellam (Helam)	✓
Antrim (Antum)	✓
Rama (Ramah)	✗
Omer (Omner)	✗
Morin (Moron)	✗
Minoa (Minon)	✗
Mantua (Manti)	✗
Kishkiminetas (Kishkumen)	✗
Jacobsburg (Jacobugath)	✗
Conner (Comner)	✗
Antioch (Ani-Anti)	✗
Alma (Alma, Valley of)	✗

The following eight names theorized in the Vernal Holley model are also in the Bible. So, if Joseph Smith were to copy them, **the Bible would be a more plausible source for these names in the Book of Mormon than random towns and lands, sometimes hundreds of miles away.** At the same time, if ancient peoples came from the Old World to the New World, they may have named these cities after Israelite names.

Potential names connected to the Book of Mormon	Existed in 1830
Land of Midian (Land of Midian)	✓
Noah Lakes (Valley of Noah)	✓
Jordan (Jordan)	✓
Boaz (Boaz)	✓
Shiloh (Shilom) *Shiloh existed but did not appear on maps in 1822/1831	✓✗
Monroe (Moroni) *Monroe existed but did not appear on maps in 1822/1831	✓✗
Jerusalem (Jerusalem)	✗
Ephrem, Saint (Ephraim, Hill)	✗

→ How did Joseph Smith borrow names from small towns and bodies of water hundreds of miles away that did not exist until after 1830?

When I discovered the above facts, I was floored that critics still use the Holley model to criticize the Book of Mormon. **Why has Jeremy not removed this section from the CES Letter?** Jeremy removed the Monroe and Moroni connection, but the rest remains. The original 28 out of 86 connections were not particularly strong in the first place.

With only 9% potential connections remaining (8 out of 86), why do critics still use the Vernal Holley model?

Book of Mormon | Linguistic Evidence

Questions & Concerns

As I explored critical theories of how Joseph Smith created the Book of Mormon, I was unconvinced. At best, I saw some **loose parallels** but **no cohesive way for it all to come together**. Interestingly, the more I explored the Book of Mormon rabbit hole, the more surprised I was by the sheer amount of **compelling positive evidence for its ancient origins**.

Names in the Book of Mormon

There are 188 unique names in the Book of Mormon that are not found in the Bible.

Many of these names are Hebrew or Egyptian in origin, which is to be expected for a people who emigrated from ancient Jerusalem in 600 B.C.

In 1830, people knew far less about ancient Egyptian and Hebrew than historians do today.

→ How did Joseph Smith figure out the following Egyptian and Hebrew connections?

Potential Egyptian Book of Mormon Names	Potential Old-World Connection
Aha – Son of the Nephite commander-in-chief.	Aha – A name of the first Pharaoh; it means “warrior” and is a common word.
Aminadab – Nephite missionary in the time of the judges.	Amanathabi – Chief of a Canaanite city under Egyptian domination. This name is “reformed” Egyptian.
Ammon – The commonest name in the Book of Mormon.	Ammon (Amon, Amun) – The commonest name in the Egyptian Empire: the great universal God of the Empire.
Ammoni-hah – Name of a country and city.	Ammuni-ra – Prince of Beirut under Egyptian rule.
Cameni-hah – A Nephite general	Khamuni-ra – Amarna a personal name, perhaps the equivalent of Ammuni-ra.
Cezoram – Nephite chief judge.	Chiziri – Egyptian governor of a Syrian city.
Giddonah – a) high priest who judged Korihor, b) father of Amulek.	Dji-dw-na – The Egyptian name for Sidon.
Gidgiddoni and Gidgiddonah – Nephite generals.	Djed-djhw-ti-iw-f and Djed-djhw-ti-iw-s plus ankh – An Egyptian proper name meaning “Thoth hath said: he shall live,” and “Thoth hath said: she shall live,” respectively. On this pattern the two Nephite names mean “Thoth hath said I shall live,” and “Thoth hath said: we shall live,” respectively.
Giddianhi – Robber chief and general.	Djhw-ti-ankhi – “Thoth is my life”; see detail listed above.
Gim gim-no – City of Gim gim, compare Biblical No-Amon, “City of Amon.”	Kenkeme – Egyptian city, cf. Kipkip, seat of the Egyptian dynasty in Nubia.
Hem – Brother of the earlier Ammon.	Hem – A title meaning “servant,” specifically of Ammon, as in the title Hem tp n ‘Imn, “chief servant of Ammon” held by the high priest of Thebes.
Helaman – Great Nephite prophet.	Her-amon – “in the presence of Amon,” as in the Egyptian proper name Heri-i-her-imn. The Semitic “I” is always written “r” in the Egyptian language, which has no “l.” Conversely, an Egyptian “r” is often written “l” in Semitic languages.
Himni – A son of King Mosiah.	Hmn – A name of the Egyptian hawk-god, symbol of the emperor.

Potential Egyptian Book of Mormon Names	Potential Old-World Connection
Korihor – A political agitator who was seized by the people of Ammon.	Kherihor (also written Khurhor, etc.) – A great high priest of Ammon who seized the throne of Egypt at Thebes, cir. 1085 b.c.
Manti – The name of a Nephite soldier, a land, a city, and a hill.	Manti – The Semitic form of an Egyptian proper name, e.g., Manti-mankhi, a prince in Upper Egypt cir. 650 b.c. It is a late form of Month, god of Hermonthis.
Mathoni – A Nephite disciple.	Maitena, Mattenos, etc. – Two judges of Tyre, who at different times made themselves king, possibly under Egyptian auspices.
Morianton – The name of a Nephite city and its founder, cf. the Nephite province Moriantum.	Meriaton and Meriamon – Names of Egyptian princes, “Beloved of Aton” and “Beloved of Amon” respectively.
Nephi – Founder of the Nephite nation.	Nehi, Nehri – Famous Egyptian noblemen. Nfy was the name of an Egyptian captain. Since the Book of Mormon insists on “ph,” Nephi is closer to Nihpi, the original name of the god Pa-nepi, which may even have been Nephi.
Paanchi – Son of Pahoran, Sr., and pretender to the chief-judgeship.	Paanchi – Son of Kherihor, a) chief high priest of Amon, b) ruler of the south who conquered all of Egypt and was high priest of Amon at Thebes.
Pahoran – a) great chief judge, b) son of the same.	Pa-her-an – Ambassador of Egypt in Palestine, where his name has the “Reformed” reading Pahura; in Egyptian as Pa-her-y it means “the Syrian” or Asiatic.
Pacumeni – Son of Pahoran.	Pakamen – An Egyptian proper name meaning “blind man”; also Pamenches (Gk. Pachomios), commander of the south and high priest of Horus.
Pachus – Revolutionary leader and usurper of the throne.	Pa-ks and Pach-qs – Egyptian proper names. Compare Pa-ches-I, “he is praised.”
Sam – Brother of Nephi.	Sam Tawi – Egyptian “uniter of the lands,” a title taken by the brother of Nehri upon mounting the throne.
Seezor-am and Zeezr-om – A depraved judge, and a lawyer, resp., the latter also the name of a city.	Zoser, Zeser, etc. – A third Dynasty ruler, one of the greatest Pharaohs.
Zemna-ri-hah – Robber chief.	Zmn-ha-re – An Egyptian proper name: the same elements as the above in a different order—a common Egyptian practice.
Zeniff – Ruler of Nephite colony.	Znb, Snb – Very common elements in Egyptian proper names, cf. Senep-ta.

Source: *The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley, Vol. 5, Part. 1, Ch. 2*⁴⁵

Most, if not all, of the listed connections were **unknown in 1830**.

Some more specific examples:

Nephi – Listed in the table above. John Gee alternately argues that “Nephi” could be derived from the [ancient Egyptian “nfr,” meaning “good” or “beautiful”](#).⁴⁶ If so, isn’t it interesting that Nephi repeats

the theme of “goodness” throughout his writings? That would make a creative triple pun⁴⁷ in the first verse of the Book of Nephi:

“I, **Nephi**, having been born of **goodly** parents, therefore I was taught somewhat in all the learning of my father; and having seen many afflictions in the course of my days, nevertheless, having been highly favored of the Lord in all my days; yea, having had a great knowledge of the **goodness** and the mysteries of God, therefore I make a record of my proceedings in my days.”

→ **How did Joseph Smith create a triple pun in a dead language** in the first verse of the Book of Mormon?

Paanchi – As listed in the table above, in Helaman 1, Paanchi is one of the three sons of Pahoran seeking the chief judgeship. **Paanchi is the same name as one of the most well-known kings in Egyptian history.**⁴⁸ Paanchi is **not mentioned in the Bible**. His name and history remained **unknown to scholars until the end of the nineteenth century**. Hugh Nibley comments that he was a “contemporary of Isaiah and a chief actor in the drama of Egyptian history at a time in which that history was intimately involved in the affairs of Palestine.”⁴⁹

→ **How did Joseph Smith know about a famous Egyptian king who was unknown to scholars until after Joseph’s death?**

Pahoran, Paanchi, and Pacumeni – As listed in the table above. Evidence Central reports that:

“At the beginning of the book of Helaman, readers encounter a confusing cluster of three similar sounding names: two men (a father and a son) named Pahoran, as well as the son’s two brothers Paanchi and Pacumeni (Helaman 1:2–3). Although this constellation of names would be an unlikely choice for a good fiction writer, Hugh Nibley noticed that it rings true for a record written in ‘reformed Egyptian’ (Mormon 9:32–34). ‘A striking coincidence,’ Nibley noted, ‘is the predominance among both Egyptian and Nephite judge names of the prefix Pa-. In late Egyptian, this [prefix] is extremely common.’ Each of the[se] names, and not just the initial pa- (Egyptian p3- = “the”) prefix, **bears striking resemblance to Egyptian names.**”⁵⁰ (emphasis added)

The Book of Mormon also has several Hebrew names that are not in the Bible. They include Sariah, Alma, Abish, Aha, Ammonihah, Chemish, Hagoth, Himni, Isabel, Jarom, Josh, Luram, Mathoni, Mathonihah, Muloki, and Sam. The connection these names have to ancient Hebrew was unknown in Joseph Smith’s day.⁵¹

Alma - Alma was widely seen as a woman’s name with Semitic or Latin roots. **Critics panned Joseph Smith for this “obvious” mistake.**

*“Alma is supposed to be a prophet of God and of Jewish ancestry in the Book of Mormon. In Hebrew Alma means a betrothed virgin maiden—hardly a fitting name for a man.”*⁵² – a prominent Evangelical author, Walter Martin (1978).

Since 1830, evidence has **confirmed that Alma is an ancient Semitic male name**. This evidence includes the 1961 discovery of the Bar Kokhba letters, where “Alma, son of Judah,” is named **in ancient Israel.**⁵³

→ **How did Joseph Smith know that Alma was an ancient male name in ancient Israel? Why did Joseph Smith not amend the Book of Mormon when his critics mocked him? Have any critics apologized to Joseph Smith yet?**

Sariah - **Critics mocked Joseph for naming Lehi's wife Sariah**, which was understood at the time to be an ancient male Hebrew name. That is until the name Sariah appeared on [papyri in the Egyptian Jewish community of Elephantine, dating to around 500 BC for two women](#).⁵⁴

How did Joseph Smith know that Israelite women from Egypt also carried the name of Sariah around the same time as Sariah in the Book of Mormon? Wouldn't Joseph's only source for Sariah (Seraiah) have been men in the Old Testament?

Jershon – In [Alma 27:22](#), the Nephites give the converted Anti-Nephi-Lehites a piece of land in their territory. “This land **Jershon** is the land which we give unto our brethren for an **inheritance**.” (emphasis added) How interesting is it that the word “**Jershon**” is likely Hebrew for “**place of inheritance**”?⁵⁵ Doesn't this make a creative play on words in the Book of Mormon? How familiar was Joseph Smith with ancient Hebrew in 1829?

Update: Critics harp on “mistakes” in the Book of Mormon until researchers find evidence to support its ancient origins. As more ancient linguistic connections are uncovered, critics rarely credit the Book of Mormon. Instead, they seem to double down on the increasingly shorter list of “mistakes” in the Book of Mormon.

Reformed Egyptian and Hebrew

In 721 BC, the Assyrians invaded the northern kingdom (Israel) and took thousands into captivity. From that point on, the northern tribes were lost to history. Thousands sought refuge in the southern kingdom (Judah). 120 years later, it is plausible that Lehi would not have known his lineage from the tribe of Manasseh.

In the very first chapter of the Book of Mormon, Nephi informs the reader that he is making a record “in the language of my father, which consists of the learning of the Jews and the language of the Egyptians” ([1 Nephi 1:2](#))—that is oddly specific.

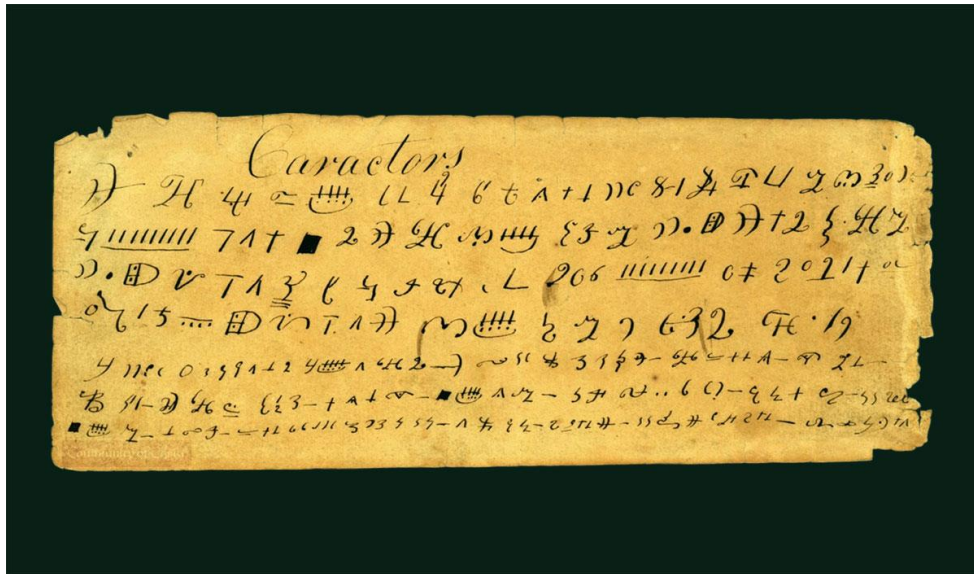
“**Such propositions would likely have been scorned in Joseph Smith's day**; doctors of theology in the early 1800s would have based their views of Egyptian-Israelite relations primarily upon the Israelites' seeming disdain for Egyptian culture as reflected in the Bible.” (emphasis added) – John S. Thompson ([Glimpses of Lehi's Jerusalem](#), 2004)⁵⁶

Scholars are still learning about **Egypt's cultural influence in Israel during Lehi's day**.⁵⁷ **Artifacts with Egyptian characters dating back to that period show the widespread usage of Egyptian in Israel.** Critics viewed Egyptian and Israelite relations through an 1830's lens. They mocked Joseph Smith for this apparent mistake as they perceived Israel and Egypt to be on more hostile terms.

→ On the surface, an uninspired Joseph Smith would have likely suspected that Hebrew was the language of Lehi. **How did Joseph understand Egypt's cultural influence in Israel in 600 BC?** How did he come up with what turns out to be a very plausible narrative in the book?

Caractors Document

Historians believe⁵⁸ that John Whitmer copied characters (given to him by Joseph) from the Book of Mormon in the “Caractors” document.



Source: [Doctrine and Covenants Central](#)

Critics have dissected the Caractors document to make the characters seem less authentic and ancient than they are. By twisting, slightly altering, and flipping characters, Charles Shook created this chart (on the next page) in *Cumorah Revisited* (1910). Critics joke that “reformed Egyptian” is just “deformed English.”

Here is my attempt to do the same thing with the Paleo-Hebrew script. In about 15 minutes, I downloaded a Paleo Hebrew font in Word and formed an English-looking sentence.

Letters from the Paleo-Hebrew alphabet

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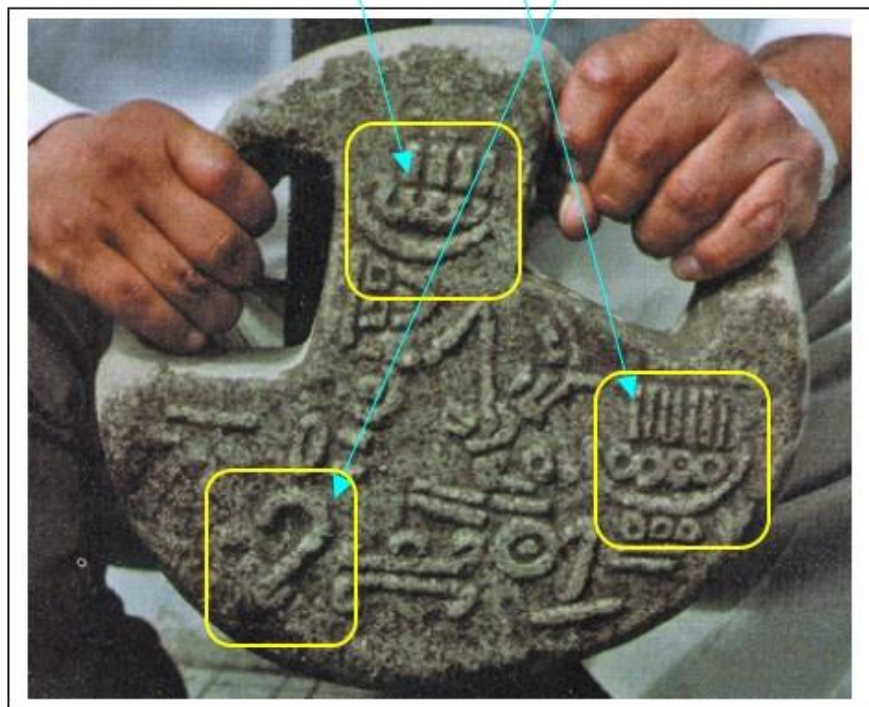
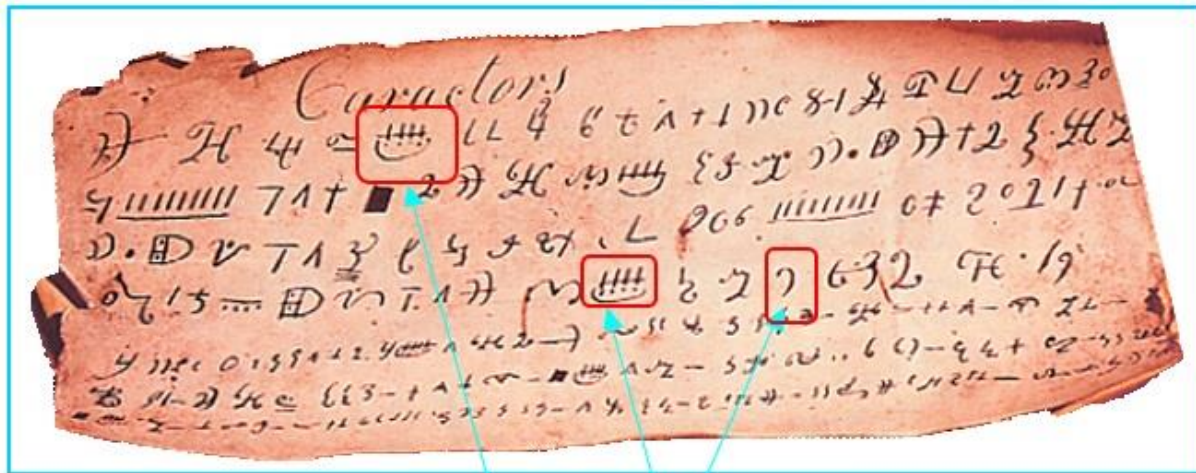
"Paleo is deformed English"

PALM 95 DEFORMED ENGLISH

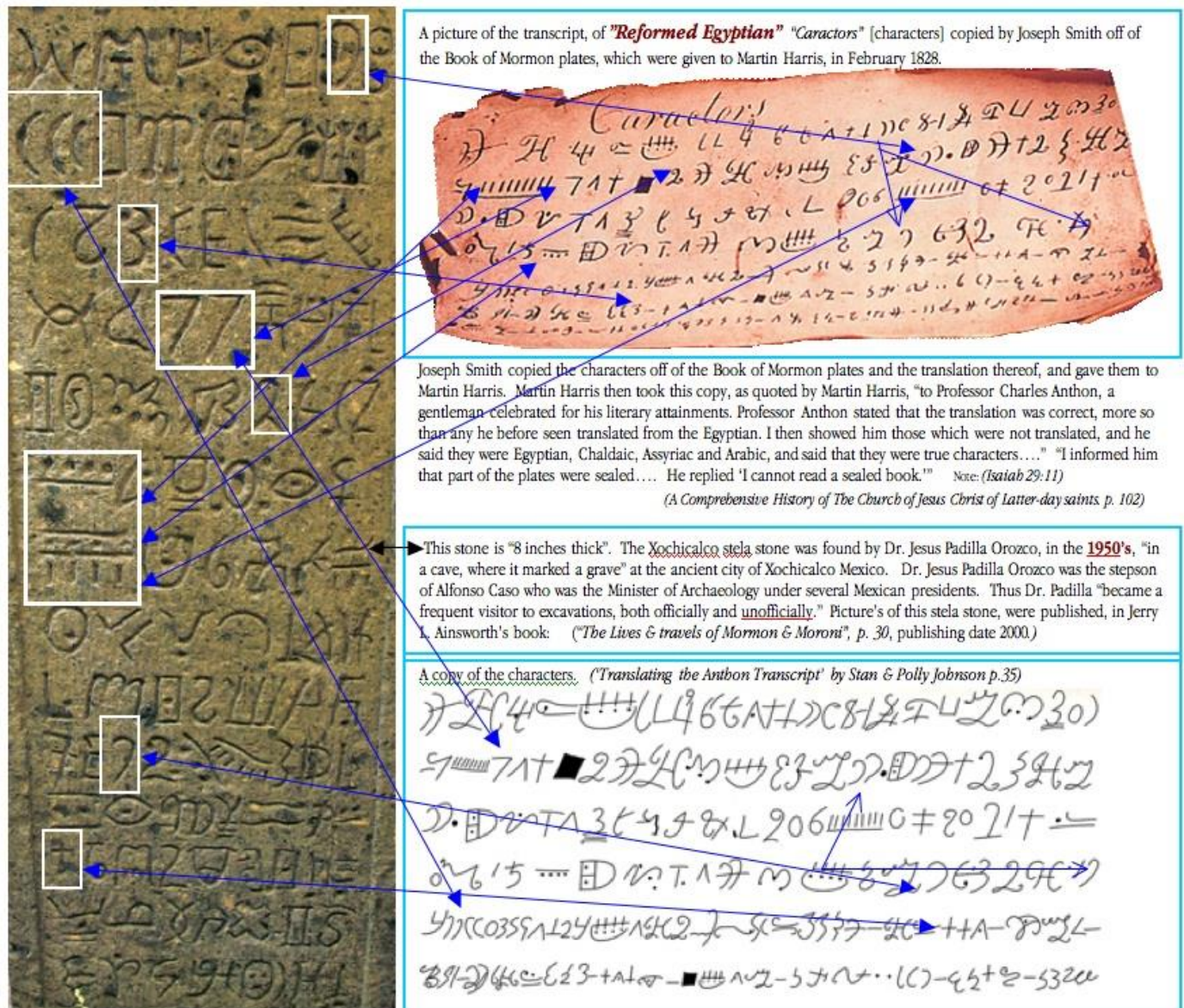
→ Critics may find it uncomfortable that many characters in the Caractors document have ancient origins. As stated previously, parallels are generally not conclusive proof of authenticity. However, how do critics explain that characters in the Carators document **resemble ancient American and Egyptian characters?**

Geologist, civil engineer, and professional translator Jerry Grover provides an over [400-page analysis](#) (available for free online) of the Caractors document and its potential connections to ancient Egyptian, Hebrew, and Mayan languages. The following pages contain samples of visuals and commentary that are found on Phil Michel's *supportingevidences.net* website, in the [reformed Egyptian and Hebrew sections](#).

Discovery of a "Lock" stone in the 1950s in San Pedro, Mexico.



The Xochicalco stela stone found near the ancient city of Xochicalco, Mexico.



A picture of the transcript, of **"Reformed Egyptian"** "Caractors" [characters] copied by Joseph Smith off of the Book of Mormon plates, which were given to Martin Harris, in February 1828.

Joseph Smith copied the characters off of the Book of Mormon plates and the translation thereof, and gave them to Martin Harris. Martin Harris then took this copy, as quoted by Martin Harris, "to Professor Charles Anthon, a gentleman celebrated for his literary attainments. Professor Anthon stated that the translation was correct, more so than any he before seen translated from the Egyptian. I then showed him those which were not translated, and he said they were Egyptian, Chaldaic, Assyriac and Arabic, and said that they were true characters...." "I informed him that part of the plates were sealed.... He replied 'I cannot read a sealed book.'" *See: (Isaiah 29:11)*
(A Comprehensive History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day saints p. 102)

This stone is "8 inches thick". The Xochicalco stela stone was found by Dr. Jesus Padilla Orozco, in the **1950's**, "in a cave, where it marked a grave" at the ancient city of Xochicalco Mexico. Dr. Jesus Padilla Orozco was the stepson of Alfonso Caso who was the Minister of Archaeology under several Mexican presidents. Thus Dr. Padilla "became a frequent visitor to excavations, both officially and unofficially." Picture's of this stela stone, were published, in Jerry L. Ainsworth's book: *("The Lives & travels of Mormon & Moroni", p. 30, publishing date 2000.)*

A copy of the characters. *("Translating the Anthon Transcript" by Stan & Polly Johnson p.35)*

Some characters from the Caractors document compared to Egyptian.

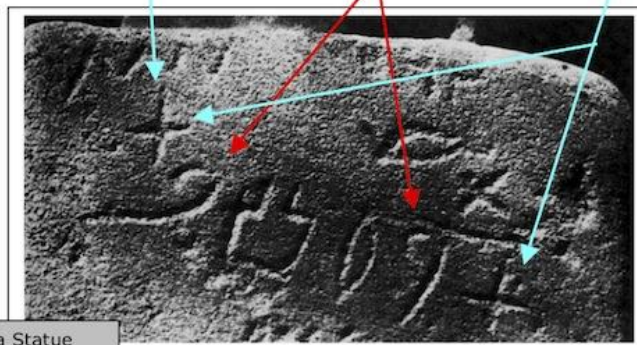
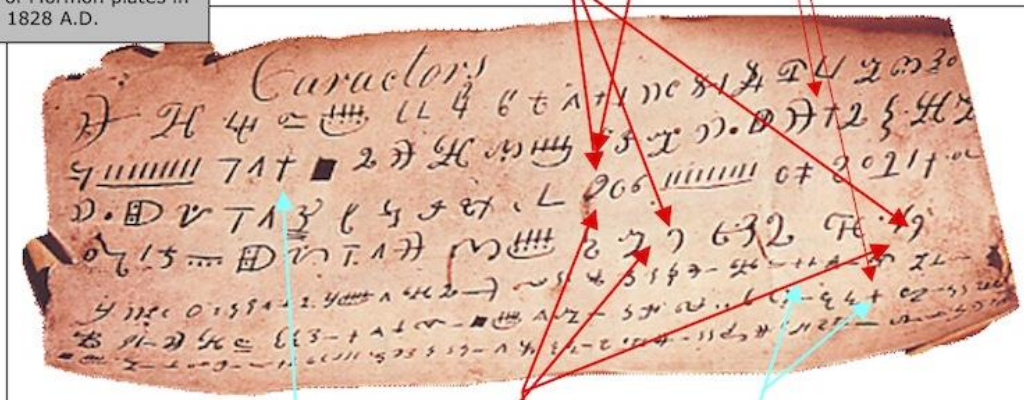
Smith	Egypt	Smith	Egypt	Smith	Egypt
					
					
					
					
					
					

Characters from the Caractors document compared to characters from the statue of Serabit-el-Khadim on the Sinai Peninsula of Egypt.

Comparing the writings on stone statues, to the Reformed Egyptian copied by Joseph Smith off of the Book of Mormon plates.



Reformed Egyptian characters
copied by Joseph Smith off of
the Book of Mormon plates in
1828 A.D.



→ How did a **farmer from upstate New York**, with limited resources and education, manage to **create characters that have been discovered in ancient writings**?

Uto-Aztecan Language

Linguist Brian D. Stubbs published a study identifying **1528 connections** between the Uto-Aztecan and Semitic/Egyptian languages.⁶⁰ He estimates that approximately **30 % - 40 % of the Uto-Aztecan language is derived from Semitic and Egyptian languages**.⁶¹ He concludes that the Uto-Aztecan and Near Eastern languages integrated **between 2500 and 3000 years ago**.⁶²

→ Don't these linguistic connections make a stronger case for the Book of Mormon? Didn't Moroni say that there were Egyptian and Hebrew elements in their speech that were "altered by us"?

"And now, behold, we have written this record according to our knowledge, in the characters which are called among us the **reformed Egyptian, being handed down and altered by us**, according to our manner of speech. And if our plates had been sufficiently large we should have written in Hebrew; but the Hebrew hath been altered by us also; and if we could have written in Hebrew, behold, ye would have had no imperfection in our record." – (emphasis added) [Mormon 9:32–33](#)

Do parallels between Uto-Aztecan and Semitic/Egyptian languages absolutely prove the Book of Mormon's divine authenticity? They do not. However, why do we continue to discover more things supporting the Book of Mormon's claims if it was fabricated by a no-name man in 1829?

Voices in the Book of Mormon

Lewis Theobald produced a play called **Double Falsehood** in 1727. He claimed its author was the great William Shakespeare. The problem is that Shakespeare had passed away over 100 years earlier. Theobald's claim was nearly impossible to prove. Most skeptics believed Lewis Theobald made up the claim to bolster ticket sales. Some believed that Shakespeare and John Fletcher co-wrote the play (they had written a couple of plays together early in Shakespeare's career). Unfortunately, the original manuscript was destroyed in a fire. Without the original handwriting, **no one could prove the authorship**. Until recently, most believed the *Double Falsehood* was a Theobald production. Then in 2015, researchers from the University of Texas **leveraged computing power** to solve the mystery. Using a sophisticated computer model, they analyzed Shakespeare's, Theobald's, and Fletcher's language, style, and voice. From this, they could **create a psychological signature for each author**. The model could determine who wrote *Double Falsehood*.⁶³ They determined that **Shakespeare likely authored the first three acts—the final two being authored by Fletcher**. Theobald's editorial hand was also identified.

John Hilton III uses a similar method in his book *Voices of the Book of Mormon*. After a decade of research, John identifies the **"linguistic fingerprints of many of the major speakers in the Book of Mormon."** (emphasis added)⁶⁴ Nephi, Mormon, and Moroni compiled or wrote most of the Book of Mormon. However, there are other authors quoted. Sometimes, these quotes are lengthy sections or whole chapters. These voices include Jacob, Alma, Abinadi, Nephi (son of Helaman), and Jesus Christ. **John's research shows a wide range of variety from the different authors of the Book of Mormon**. Also, the linguistic fingerprints of the **Book of Mormon authors are distinct from Joseph Smith's voice** in his other writings. 19th-century [authors, on the other hand, have](#)

limited voice diversity between different characters in their books.⁶⁵ Even characters that differ from others in the same book written by typical 19th-century authors usually cluster around a specific range of voice diversity.

→ **How did Joseph Smith remember and keep the different voices of the Book of Mormon authors distinct?**

How did Joseph Smith remember to have Nephi say the phrase “My Soul Delighteth”⁶⁶ eleven times while no other author in the Book of Mormon uses that phrase?

Why does Jesus Christ use the word “baptize” more than anyone else in the Book of Mormon?⁶⁷

How did Joseph Smith remember to distinguish the voice of Jacob in 2 Nephi 9-10 from the voice of Nephi in 2 Nephi 4-5 and 11 if both were his creations?⁶⁸

While the voice diversity is impressive, John Hilton also identifies the layers of intertextuality within the Book of Mormon, which adds to its complexity. For example, when Alma was teaching his son Corianton (Alma 39-42), he quoted Abinadi’s teachings and phrases hundreds of pages earlier (from Mosiah 12-13) that applied to Corianton’s concerns.⁶⁹

→ How did Joseph Smith create a book with so many layers of complexity and intertextuality?⁷⁰ With his limited education, in less than 90 days, in one draft, with no manuscripts to consult, off the top of his head, no less?

Jonathan Cannon summarizes the various stylometry arguments for the Book of Mormon. His article “[Book of Mormon Stylometry in Pictures and Tables](#)”⁷¹ visually demonstrates how impressive the stylometry differences in the Book of Mormon are.

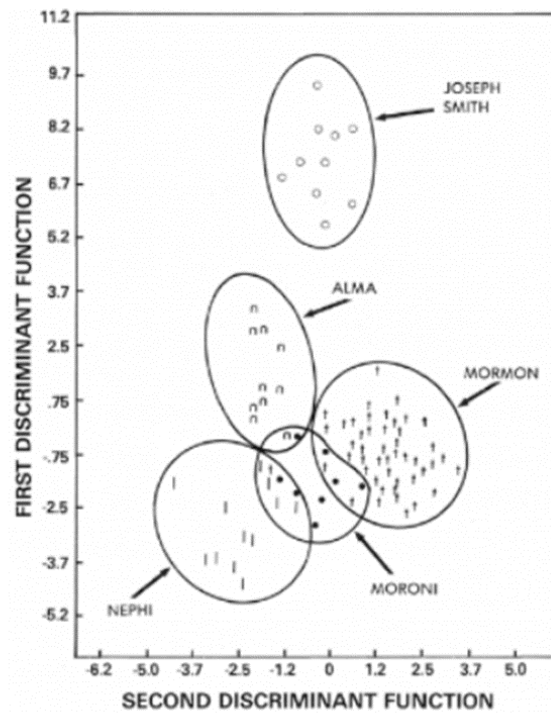


Figure 1 – A visual representation of how different voices of the Book of Mormon compare to each other and from the voice of Joseph Smith.

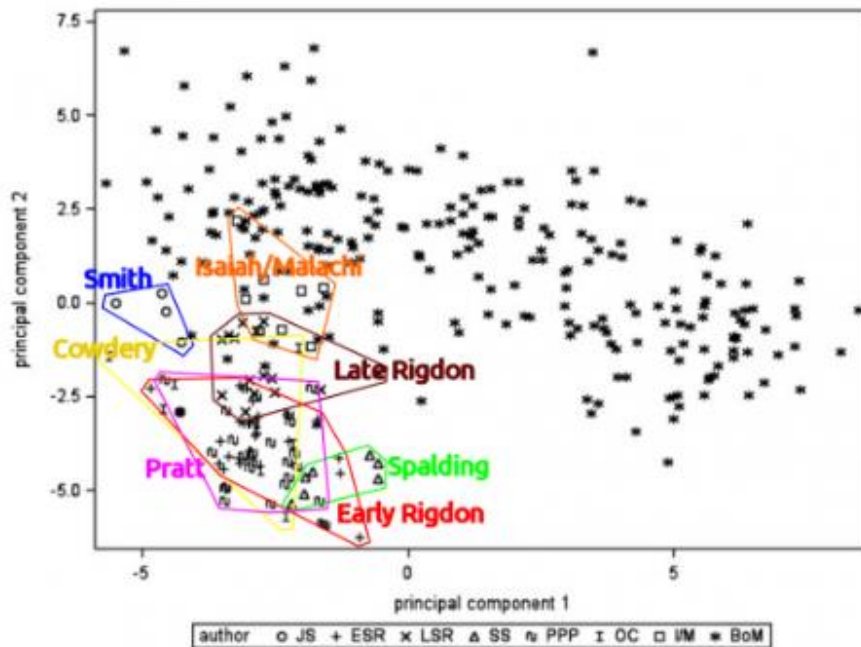


Figure 2 – A visual cluster of the authors that critics theorize wrote the Book of Mormon (Cowdery, Pratt, Spalding, Rigdon, Smith) and how different they are from the Book of Mormon writers.

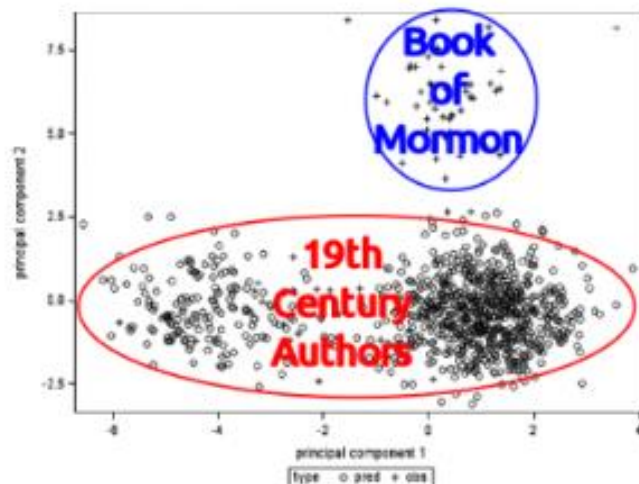


Figure 3 – A visual cluster of 19th-century authors compared to the Book of Mormon authors.

Does literary evidence undeniably verify the Book of Mormon's claim of divine origin? Not quite. However, isn't it interesting? Compelling? Worth exploring?

Hebraisms

Ancient Hebrew's unique characteristics are evident even when translated into different languages. Hebraisms are when these features occur in another language.

The Book of Mormon contains **hundreds of Hebraisms**;⁷² how? Below are a small sample of some of them.

And it Came to Pass

"And it came to pass," was [Joseph Smith's] pet. If he had left that out, his bible would have been only a pamphlet." – MARK TWAIN⁷³

The Book of Mormon uses the phrase "and it came to pass" 1404 times. The Old Testament of the King James Version uses the same phrase 727 times. **"And it came to pass"** is a **translation** of the **Hebrew word "wayehi"**.⁷⁴ The King James version of the Old Testament translates "wayehi" as "and it came to pass," "and it happened," "and ... became," or "and ... was." Likely the different phrases are used in translation for variety's sake. In all, there are **1204 instances of "wayehi" in the Hebrew bible**. The Old Testament and Book of Mormon use "and it came to pass" in the more **narrative sections**. The more literary parts lack that phrase.

→ As a more narrative text, **extensive use of "it came to pass" shows the Book of Mormon's ancient Hebrew fingerprints**. How did Joseph Smith figure that out?

If-And Conditionals

If-and conditionals are a Hebrew literary form not used in modern-day English. It is not present in the Bible or found in other accessible books for Joseph Smith. Linguist Royal Skousen first [identified if-and conditionals in the original version and printer's manuscript of the Book of Mormon](#). Joseph Smith later removed most of them to make the passages more readable in 1837. The **original publication** of the Book of Mormon has **fifteen if-and conditionals**.

Royal Skousen shares:

"In English, it is common to express a conditional idea in the following manner: 'If you come, then I will come,' with then being optional. **In Hebrew this same idea is expressed in another manner: 'if you come, and I will come.'** This structure makes perfect sense in Hebrew but is not found in English. **When Joseph Smith translated 1 Nephi 17:50, he dictated 'if he should command me that I should say unto this water be thou earth, and it shall be earth.'** This non-English construction was removed from this verse by Oliver Cowdery as he copied the original manuscript to produce the printer's manuscript. He deleted the word and, making the text read better in English. The sentence now reads: 'if he should ..., it should be earth.'" ⁷⁵ (emphasis added)

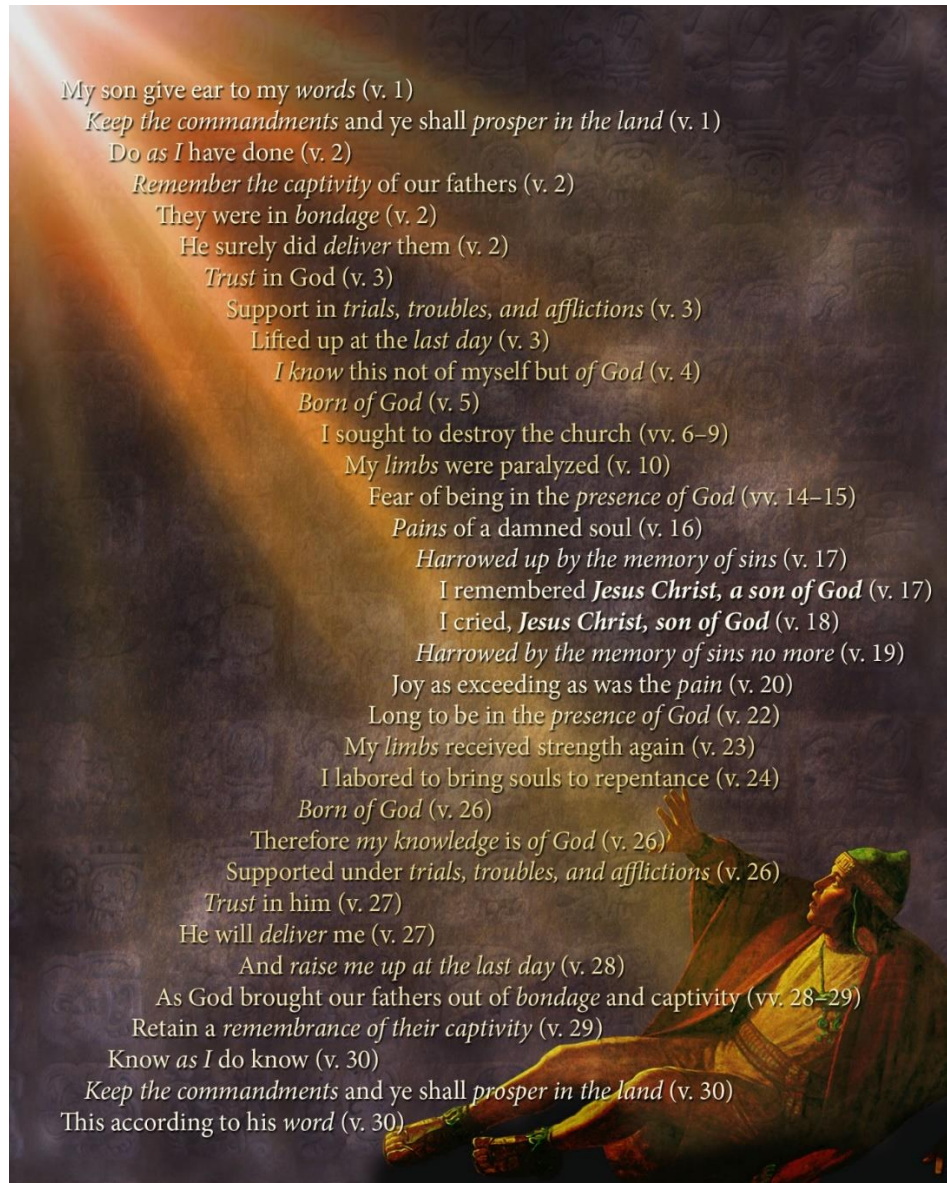
Other examples include Helaman [12:13-21](#) and [Moroni 10:4](#).

How did Joseph Smith pick up on this ancient Hebrew literary if-and conditional when it is not correct English? A one-off could have been a grammatical error, but fifteen instances?

Chiasmus

"Chiasmus" was a popular literary device in ancient languages like Greek, Latin, and Hebrew.⁷⁶ It is a type of **poetic inverted parallelism**. Its existence in the Book of Mormon demonstrates **a high level of sophistication** by Hebrew writers. Chiasmus was not consciously used in American writing until the 1850s. John Welch was the first scholar to identify chiasmus in the Book of Mormon in 1967.⁷⁷ There are **dozens of chiasmi in the Book of Mormon**, though not every one may be deliberate. A statistical analysis from Edwards and Edwards demonstrates that **the chiasmus in Alma 36, Mosiah 3:18-19, Mosiah 5:10-12, and Helaman 9:6-11 were likely created by thoughtful design**.⁷⁸

Here is the chiasmus in Alma 36 as it came from Joseph Smith's lips. Its beauty and complexity make it nearly impossible to believe he made it up on the fly. Note that Jesus Christ is the center of Alma's redemption story.



Source: Alma 36 Chiasm by Book of Mormon Central

Isn't Alma 36 a stunning demonstration of redemption and the power of Christ's atonement?

→ **How did Joseph Smith come up with Alma 36 and other chiasmus in the Book of Mormon off the top of his head** with zero experience in ancient Hebrew literary forms?

Further, Allen Christenson found that [chiasmus abounds in sixteen out of thirty-seven late Mayan texts](#) written shortly after the Spanish conquest in the sixteenth century. Chiasmus is especially prevalent in Mayan historical and religious passages.⁷⁹ None of the highland Mayan documents composed after 1580 include chiasmus passages.

Are Hebraisms a bullseye for the Book of Mormon? Not quite. Nevertheless, aren't they at least interesting? Worth exploring?

Book of Mormon | Linguistic Evidence Conclusion

The further along my faith journey I traveled, the less comfortable I was with critical explanations for the Book of Mormon. I marveled at the critic's conspiracy theory-like reconstruction of how Joseph Smith created the Book of Mormon. When I mentally recreated the critic's narrative, I felt like I was left with a scenario more unbelievable than an angel simply giving golden plates to Joseph. Then, as I learned more about the linguistic connections between ancient languages and the Book of Mormon, I was even more baffled by the book. While linguistic evidence for the Book of Mormon was not enough on its own to convince me of the truth claims of the restoration, I was starting to feel unsettled as a potential atheist.

Book of Mormon | Archeology, DNA, & Anachronisms

Questions and Concerns

“There is no archeological evidence of the Book of Mormon.”

I quickly found that this was a go-to phrase for critics. Atheists and religious critics of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints generally agree on this point. If there were “no archeological evidence,” that would be a real problem for the Church. Indeed, if the Book of Mormon is a book covering events that happened, then we should have found something, right?

Archeological Evidence

Today, we know far more about the history of early Israelites and Indigenous American people than Joseph Smith would have ever known. Why does the Book of Mormon look better and better as we learn more about the ancient world?

The more I learned, the more confused I became by critics' claims that there is "no archeological evidence of the Book of Mormon." I suppose each person can define what a sufficient level of proof is. However, archeology is a messy field of study, and ancient peoples rarely leave behind scrolls that say, **"Nephi was definitely here."**

→ How do critics account for the following if "no archeological evidence" exists?

Frankincense Trail

In [1 Nephi 2:5](#), Lehi takes his family into the wilderness out of Jerusalem "near the shore of the Red Sea." This journey, as described in the Book of Mormon, has been a subject of scrutiny. However, long after the Book of Mormon was published, historians made a significant discovery- the **"Frankincense Trail."** The trail was in use in Lehi's day and [fits the description of Lehi's journey out of Jerusalem](#).⁸⁰ **Details such as the valley of Lemuel, the Laman River, and the decreasing fertility the further south Lehi's family traveled all align with the Frankincense Trail.**

→ If Joseph Smith made up 1st Nephi, how did he know about this viable path along the Red Sea heading southward? How did he know this trail was in use in Lehi's day? How did Joseph Smith correctly identify the details of landmarks, water features, and vegetation?

Nahom

In [1 Nephi 16:34](#), **Ishmael dies, and his family buries him in a place called Nahom.** Nahom stands out. At other points in their journey, Lehi names locations as they pass them, like the river Laman ([1 Nephi 2:8](#)) and the valley of Lamuel ([1 Nephi 2:10](#)). But, when they get to Nahom, the scriptures say, "And it came to pass that Ishmael died, and was buried in the place which was called Nahom." The implication is that this place was **already** called Nahom before Lehi's family arrived.

In 1990, archeologists found an ancient burial mound in the Jawf Valley in Yemen. Inscribed on an altar at this burial mount were the **Hebrew letters NHM**. Egyptian and Hebraic languages do not use vowels. So, translators interpret NHM today as Nihm, Nahm, Naham, Nehm, Nihim, Nehem, or Nahom. **Yes, that Nahom.** Since then, historians have found ancient maps (unavailable to Joseph Smith) identifying this region as [the ancient territory of Nihm](#).⁸¹



Altar in Ma'rib, Yemen, with the inscription NHM, corresponding to Nephi's mention of Nahom.



Photo by Warren Aston. Effects by Book of Mormon Central.

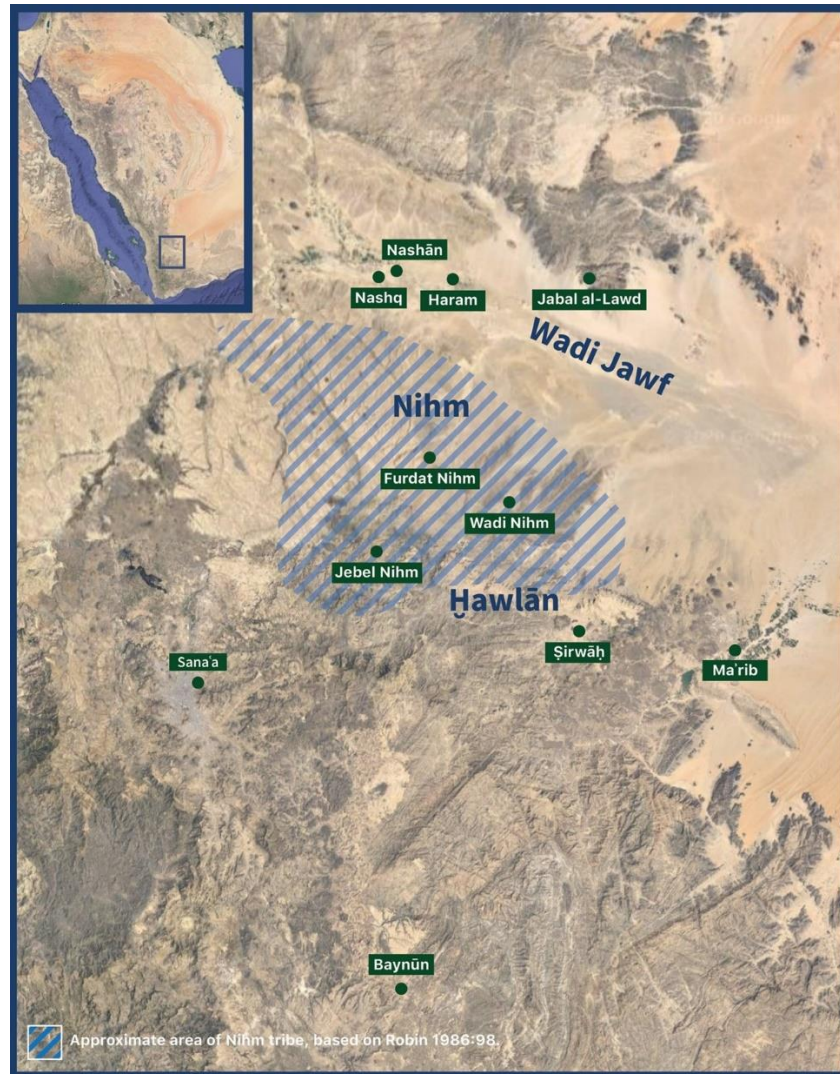


Image created by Jasmin Gimenez Rappleye.

→ How did Joseph Smith know about the **ancient city of Nahom** from 1830 resources? **How did he predict the name and location** of Nahom so accurately?

After Nahom, in [1 Nephi 17:1](#), Lehi's family traveled "**nearly eastward from that time forth.**" (emphasis added) That is an interesting detail in the Book of Mormon. The "**main ancient trade routes turned eastward at the Wadi Jawf, near Nihm.** This was the **only area where nearly direct eastward travel was possible.**"⁸² (emphasis added)

That locates **Nahom of the Book of Mormon** in the ancient world in the **right spot on the map** from which traveling "nearly eastward" became possible.

How did Joseph Smith guess that? What are the odds of that happening?

Further, the **Hebrew root of Nahom (NHM) means "to groan."**⁸³ The Book of Mormon records that at Nahom, "it came to pass that the daughters of Ishmael did **mourn exceedingly**, because of the loss of their father." ([1 Nephi 16:35](#); emphasis added)

How proficient was Joseph Smith in ancient Hebrew in 1829?

Bountiful

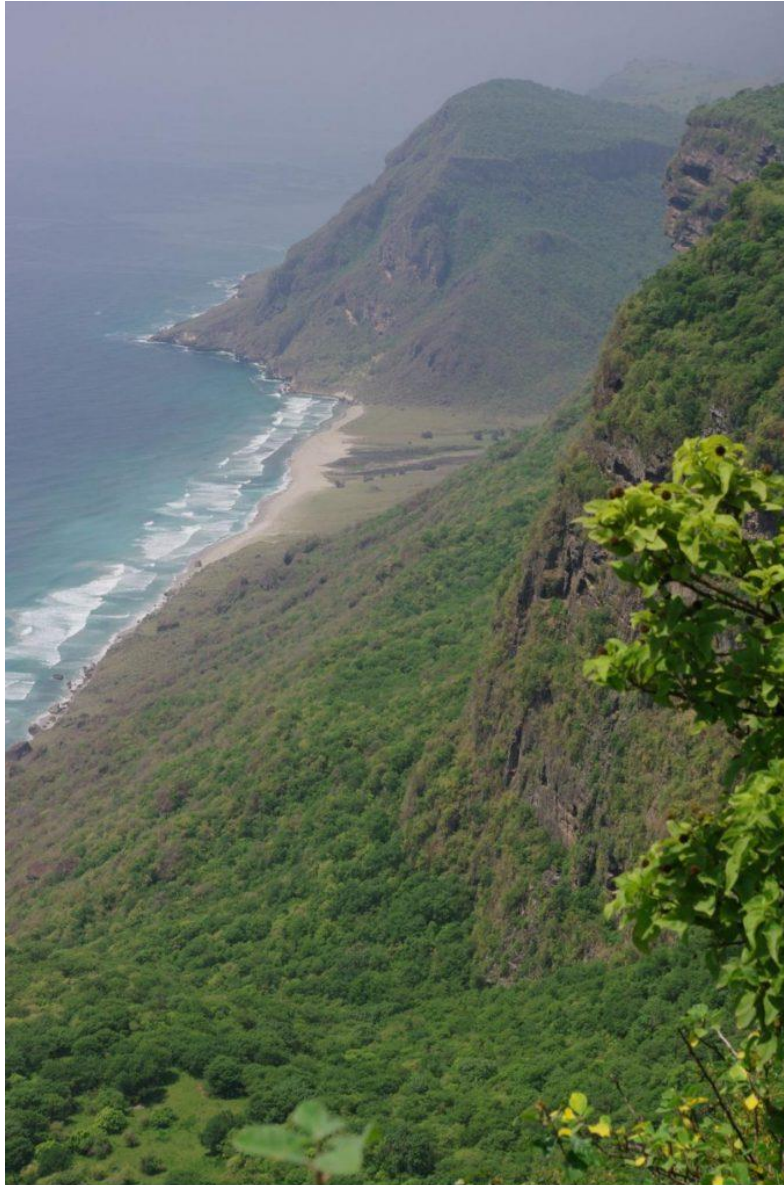
“Arabia is bountiful in sunshine, petroleum, sand, heat, and fresh air, but certainly not in much fruit and wild honey,' nor has it been since the creation of time.” – THOMAS KEY (1985)⁸⁴

Critics mocked the Book of Mormon for describing **a land** on the coast of modern-day Yemen/Oman that had “**much fruit and also wild honey**” (emphasis added, [1 Nephi 17:5](#)). Joseph Smith’s contemporaries understood that region to be a sprawling, never-ending desert.

In 1976, explorers discovered a widely [unknown part of Oman that fits the description of the Book of Mormon’s Bountiful in the Old World](#).⁸⁵ **Khor Kharfot and Khor Rori in Oman** are both great candidates for the Bountiful in the Book of Mormon. They have **fresh water, large trees, fruit, and vegetation**. They also have **mountains** for Nephi to pray ([1 Nephi 17:7](#)), **ore** for tool making ([1 Nephi 17:10](#)), **cliffs** by which Laman and Lemuel threaten to “toss me [Nephi] into the sea” ([1 Nephi 17:48](#)), and also **seashore** for a boat launch into the ocean.

Additionally, [Dr. Ric Hauck discovered the remains of what seems to be an ancient temple in Khor Kharfot](#). The site of this sanctuary is the **same size and proportion as the Temple of Solomon**. It faces due east, as Hebrew law would say it should, and its proportions resemble those of the Temple of Solomon. Dr. Hauck suggests 14 correlations between the Khor Kharfot sanctuary and the Temple of Solomon.⁸⁶

Further, non-Latter-day Saint biblical scholar Ziony Zevit suggests that **Eden is an ancient Semitic name meaning “Bountiful.”**⁸⁷ A fitting end in the old world to the eight-year exodus of Lehi’s family.



This view of Khor Kharfot facing southwest has been used in numerous publications, including the Encyclopedia of Mormonism, to represent the place in the Old World called Bountiful in the Book of Mormon.

How did Joseph Smith guess that there was a region eastward from Nahom on the coast of modern-day Oman that is lush and green? Isn't it lucky that a place like that even exists in that area? And it fits the geographic description of "Bountiful" in the Book of Mormon? How did Joseph Smith know this fact so contrary to the conventional wisdom of his day?

→ **How did Joseph Smith get so lucky** as to predict the **location of Bountiful in the "nearly eastward"** direction from Nahom?



Image via Warren P. Aston⁸⁸

Update: Critics maintained the narrative that a place like Bountiful could not exist along the coast of Oman/Yemen for as long as they could. Since the confirmation that Khor Kharfot and Khor Rori are viable options for Bountiful, detractors rarely mention this critique now.

→ Why do critics omit the Frankincense trail, Nahom, and Bountiful when discussing archaeology? After reading 1st Nephi, how can critics still say, "There is no archeological evidence to support the Book of Mormon?"

We do not know where the events recorded in 2nd Nephi – Moroni occurred in the Americas before the plates were buried in upstate New York. The only book in the Book of Mormon where we have a general idea of where it happened is 1st Nephi. Isn't it fascinating how accurate 1st Nephi is concerning where it happened? How did Joseph figure out the customs and geography of Lehi's day and produce an account in which every detail is accurate or plausible?

Mulek

The Book of Mormon mentions the name of another group that leaves Jerusalem, namely that of Mulek, the son of King Zedekiah ([Helaman 8:21](#)). Two problems arise for Joseph Smith if he made this up. First, the Bible does not mention the name Mulek. Second, [2 Kings 25:7](#) states that all of the sons of Zedekiah were slain.

If Joseph Smith knew the Bible as well as the critics say, then why would he forget these two important details? If Joseph wanted to start a narrative in 600 BC, wouldn't he want to

ensure he had the details down? Why does he make up a random name that is not in the Bible?

Mulek was a problem for the Book of Mormon **until** recent decades. Linguistic and archaeological evidence in recent years has vindicated the Book of Mormon. Biblical scholars argue that [Jeremiah 38:6](#) contains two mistranslations.⁸⁹ It states that Jeremiah was cast “into the dungeon of **Malchiah** the son of **Hammelech**.” The original Hebrew for “Malchiah the son of Hammelech” is MalkiYahu ben-hamMelek, which should be translated as “MalkiYahu, son of the king.” **Hammelech was rendered as a proper name when it is, in fact, simply a Hebrew title that means “the king.”**⁹⁰ More modern translations have corrected the Hammelech error by referring to Malchiah as “the King’s son” rather than the “son of Hammelech.” The point is that Jeremiah 38:6 provides contextual evidence that King Zedekiah had a son named Malchiah or MalkiYahu, who possibly was not slain as indicated in 2 Kings 25:7. Further, scholars estimate that **Mulek could be an ancient short-hand version of MalkiYahu**⁹¹ like Mike is to Michael. The first three consonants are MLK, after all.

→ How in the world did Joseph Smith know that one of the sons of Zedekiah likely survived? How did he make up a plausible nickname (Mulek) for Malchiah or MalkiYahu? Is that not a bullseye or close to it for the Book of Mormon?

David Noel Freedman, a prominent non-Mormon biblical scholar, was seemingly impressed with the Book of Mormon’s naming “Mulek” as a son of Zedekiah. He reportedly exclaimed, “If Joseph Smith came up with that one, he did pretty good!”⁹²

Also noteworthy is a small clay stamp seal bearing the name Malkiyahu ben hamelek, dating from the late 7th to early 6th century BC.⁹³ This stamp was discovered in Jerusalem in the 1980s. As discussed, MalkiYahu is simply a variant English spelling of Malchiah, and ben hamelek is “son of the king.” This clay stamp provides viable archaeological evidence for the Mulek claim in the Book of Mormon.



Image via Journal of Book of Mormon Studies.

Does Mulek prove the authenticity of the Book of Mormon? On its own, not really, but it is fascinating. I marveled at linguistic and archeological evidence like Mulek during my faith reconstruction. I would ask myself, “How is it possible that a book made up by Joseph Smith is proving more correct over time? How is he getting so much right?”

Limitation of Archaeology in the New World

Most of the Book of Mormon takes place in an unknown geographic location in the Americas. Potentially, the entire Nephite and Lamanite saga is in a [geographically limited area of only a few hundred miles](#).⁹⁴ In the Book of Mormon, distances are described as a few days' journey on foot in any direction. [Latter-day Saint researchers debate the location of the Book of Mormon people](#). Theories include the "Hemispheric model" (north and South America), the "Limited Mesoamerican" model (southern Mexico and Guatemala), and the "Heartland" model (in the Mississippi and Ohio River valleys of the United States). Other suggestions include the west coast of South America, the Baja Peninsula, and even the Malay Peninsula or parts of Africa.⁹⁵

The Mesoamerican model gets the most attention among Latter-day Saint scholars, though there is growing evidence for the Heartland model with the Hopewell Indians.^{96, 97} The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has no official opinion on the geography of the Book of Mormon.

Renowned Mayan archeologist, the late George Stuart, admitted in a 2011 interview with National Geographic, "You know, there's almost **6,000 archaeological sites, and we've dug at forty of them**."⁹⁸ (emphasis added) That is **less than 1%**. He also said, "We hardly know anything, really about the Maya."

[Tad Callister states](#),

"Suppose I were to tell you that a man surveyed 2% of the geography of the United States and then he made the unequivocal assertion that there are no large lakes in the U.S., no everglades, no mountains above 10,000 feet, no redwood forests, no volcanoes, and no gold mines, because in his 2% survey he did not see any such things. You would likely respond: How foolhardy for him to categorically state there were no such things when 98% of the U.S. had never even been seen by him. Likewise, how foolhardy to unequivocally claim there were no horses, cattle, steel, and Nephite names in Book of Mormon lands and times when at **least 98% of archaeological remains in ancient America have not been unearthed.**"⁹⁹ (emphasis added)

If I surveyed 2% of the continental United States, I'd be looking at something about the size of Oklahoma—62,397 square miles out of 3,119,884 square miles.

LiDAR

LiDAR is a remote sensing method used to examine surfaces of the earth. Light pulses are used to generate a three-dimensional model of the examined surface. **Advancements in LiDAR** scanning technology **reveal a whole new world** about the ancient American inhabitants. In 2018, *National Geographic* presented findings of the Pacunam LiDAR Initiative in a documentary titled “[Lost Treasures of the Mayan Snake Kings](#).”¹⁰⁰ They mapped ten tracts totaling 2,100 square kilometers in northern Guatemala near the Mirador Basin. That is an area less than half the size of Utah County. In this [limited LiDAR archeological scan, they discovered](#):¹⁰¹

- 65,000 previously unknown structures.
- Vast networks of elevated highways so they functioned even in the rainy season.
- Ubiquitous fortresses, ramparts, and defensive walls.
- Public works, including dikes, dams, canals, ditches, and reservoirs.
- Agricultural terraces with irrigation systems.
- Animal pens and stone quarries.
- Maya lowland population at its pinnacle could have reached 15-20 million. This would be ½ the population of Europe at the same time, even though the Maya occupied only 1/30 as much land area.
- Mayan civilization was much denser, more complex, and more advanced than expected.
- Maya cities were more interconnected with transportation infrastructure than anyone realized.
- Food production was at an industrial scale.
- Land use was intensive - nearing 100% in many areas.
- Endemic warfare over centuries was the norm.
- Warfare was prevalent in the early classic 250-500 AD era.

Here are scriptures in the Book of Mormon with parallels to the list above ([Mosiah 27:6](#), [3 Nephi 6:8](#), [Alma 49:13](#), [Alma 49:18](#), [Alma 50:4,6](#), [Alma 52:6](#), [Alma 50:12](#), [Alma 49:22](#), [Alma 17:26-27](#), [Alma 1:29](#), [Alma 48:8](#), [Mormon 1:7](#), [Jarom 1:8](#), [Helaman 3:14-15](#), [Helaman 6:12](#), [Mormon 8:8](#), [Moroni 1:2](#))

Critics mocked Joseph Smith because the Book of Mormon talked about an [advanced, numerous, and ancient American people who built large cities, temples, fortresses, and highways](#).¹⁰²

Isn't it interesting that the fortifications described in Alma 48-50 match fortifications of a similar nature among pre-Columbian native Americans, including the Mayans?¹⁰³ Earth heaped up into a ridge or wall around the city, and dirt displacement creating a ditch around the outside of the wall, a timber palisade on top of the earthen wall, and towers above the timber picket with bastions atop the tower.

→ How fascinating is it that recent findings validate the depiction of the world in the Book of Mormon?

Do any of these recent findings prove the Book of Mormon's claims? No, they do not. But it is worth noting that a **23-year-old farmer** produced a book of scripture with what was considered outrageous claims about Indigenous American people at that time —and **those claims are proving more correct almost 200 years later**.

The destruction of Indigenous people and culture

I once watched a pseudo-documentary that mocked the Book of Mormon because cities named Zarahemla and Bountiful have not yet been found in American archaeological digs. Why do critics ignore the following real challenges with Mesoamerican archeology¹⁰⁴?

1). **Mesoamerica civilizations (and others) were destroyed**

European settlers arrived in the 1500s or so. Researchers estimate that **10-40 million indigenous people lived in central Mexico** at the time. That number may have been **reduced to as few as 700,000 a century later**.¹⁰⁵ European **diseases** like smallpox, measles, and mumps **wiped out indigenous populations by 90% or more**.¹⁰⁶

Additionally, **Spaniards destroyed Aztec and Mayan cities, temples, books, names, and traditions**. Clair Bugos reports in an [article from the Smithsonian magazine](#),¹⁰⁷ "After the fall of Tenochtitlan, Cortés and his men forced the surviving Aztecs to destroy their old temples and residences and use the remnants of these razed buildings to erect a new city."

Further, the Spanish conquistadors renamed ancient indigenous cities with Spanish names.¹⁰⁸ Coatzacoalcos became Espiritu Santo. Xelha now Salamanca de Xelha. Quezalli changed to San Pedro Sacatepequez. Sakb'ajlan is now Nuestra Senora de Dolores. Nojpeten was renamed Nuestra Senora de los Remedios y San Pablo.

In an Independent.co.uk article, David Keys highlights the [limitations of Aztec research](#).¹⁰⁹ Regarding the Aztecs, he said, "It's mainly their large-scale destruction that has led to them being **erased from the world's memory**." (emphasis added)

2). **Mesoamerica faces significant climate threats, including earthquakes, volcanoes, storms, and heavy rainfall.**

[Central America is one of the most vulnerable regions in the world](#) due to **extreme climatic events**,¹¹⁰ including tropical storms, floods, earthquakes, and volcanoes. For example, a major eruption of the [Popocatepetl in central Mexico in the first half of the 1st century AD](#)¹¹¹ or the San Martín volcano in southern Mexico in the same century¹¹² shares similarities with the destruction described in 3 Nephi of the Book of Mormon.

[Anthropologist Kyle Penelope explains](#): "The Mayan civilization consisted of many city-states constantly warring with one another over boundaries and resources, and their environment varied from mountains to tropical forests to deserts with unpredictable storms."¹¹³

3). **Mesoamerican structures were not as well cared for as those of the Middle East.**

In addition to the numerous challenges to Mesoamerican archeology (including climate and decimation of Mesoamerican culture), ancient American structures have not been as well cared for as the ones in Egypt and Israel.¹¹⁴ For that reason, it is an oversimplification for critics to claim that we should find the same level of archeological findings in the Americas as in the Middle East.

4). **Mesoamerican sites are more challenging to discover, and preservation of artifacts is less likely.**

In Mesoamerica, **jungle foliage**, a **hot/humid climate**, and **acidic soil** make archeology incredibly **challenging**.¹¹⁵ Even if ancient sites are uncovered, artifacts except stone and metal are unlikely to have survived.

→ What are the odds that we will find artifacts, writings, and names from ancient Native American people at all? Let alone a specific group like the Nephites, who died out around 1100 years before European colonization.

Critics of the Church often use the fallacy of absence to argue against Book of Mormon claims. Planetary scientist Dr. Carl Sagan said, *"The absence of evidence does not mean evidence of absence."* This means that the lack of evidence for the existence of something does not prove that something does not exist at all. Efraim Wallach highlights the [shortcomings of making inferences from the absence of evidence in archaeology](#).¹¹⁶

Update: Critics used to say that writing on metal plates is ridiculous because they had never seen an example of that before. This is until archaeologists found hundreds of such writings.¹¹⁷

There are a ton of examples of historical people and events for which there is limited archaeological evidence, including:

- The Huns of Central Asia in the fourth and fifth centuries A.D. depended on thousands of horses. Yet, **no archeological evidence of horses** exists in that region.¹¹⁸
- **Virtually all battles fought in the pre-gunpowder era left little to no evidence.**¹¹⁹ Bodies were dragged off for burial in other places or consumed by scavenging animals. Valuable items get looted. By contrast, modern battles leave behind bullet casings and pieces of shrapnel.
 - For example, there is **no archaeological evidence** today of **The Battle of Hastings** in Britain in 1066.¹²⁰
- **Elephants once roamed in Syria** but became extinct in that region in about 100 BC. That was likely due to overhunting for ivory. Yet **little to no archaeological evidence** of elephants in Syria exists today.¹²¹
- **The Lost City of Thinis served as the capital of Egypt** during the first dynasty of Ancient Egypt. Yet, there is **no archaeological evidence** of it.¹²²
- There are records of **ancient Egypt trading with a city named "Punt."** Its **location is unknown today**, but it is suspected to be in Somalia.¹²³
- **Babylon** was the capital city of Babylonia, an ancient empire of Mesopotamia. Today, all that remains of that city is a **mound of broken mud bricks** presumed to have been buildings.¹²⁴
- The rainforest vegetation hid the **Mayan city of Tikal** for hundreds of years, and it was **only discovered in 1882.**¹²⁵
- The **Inca lost city of Paititi** allegedly **lies hidden east of the Andes** somewhere in Southeast Peru, North Bolivia, or Northwest Brazil.¹²⁶
- **Limited to no archaeological evidence** exists for the **enslavement of Israel in Egypt** and **Israel's exodus.**¹²⁷ Same thing with **Jesus's resurrection.**¹²⁸

→ Limited archaeological evidence in the new world is less of a win than critics want to admit. **What are the odds of finding anything pre-1500 AD in Mesoamerica?**

Cement Buildings

In [Helaman 3:4-7](#), Mormon reports that many Nephites departed from the land of Zarahemla and went northward due to contention and dissensions. The Book of Mormon includes this interesting detail, “And there being but **little timber** upon the face of the land, nevertheless the people who went forth became **exceedingly expert** in the working of cement; therefore they did **build houses of cement**, in the which they did dwell.” (emphasis added) Two details here are important: first, the land northward the Nephite groups traveled to had little timber, and second, they built homes out of cement. Not just cement but that they became “exceedingly expert” in working with cement. If Joseph Smith were making this up, he would have little basis to believe that ancient Native American people built homes out of cement.

In the Valley of Mexico, fully developed cement appeared at Teotihuacán (near modern-day Mexico City), seemingly out of nowhere in the 1st century AD. By 300 AD, “most inhabitants lived in substantial **plaster-and-concrete compounds** composed of multiple apartments.”¹²⁹ Teotihuacán was **heavily deforested**, and the inhabitants extensively used a **high-quality lime cement** that has lasted to this day.¹³⁰

While the discovery of high-quality cement buildings in Teotihuacán and other cities in central Mexico does not prove the Book of Mormon's claims, isn't it thought-provoking? It makes me wonder how Joseph came up with that despite claims about Indigenous people to the contrary.





Source: Jeff Linsday, <https://www.arisefromthedust.com/cement-at-teotihuacan/>

Update: Critics ridiculed the Book of Mormon for describing indigenous people who used cement. Since the publication of the Book of Mormon, several ancient sites have confirmed the use of cement in the Americas, including Teotihuacán. The first excavations of Teotihuacán were in 1884.

Sambaj in Atitlan Lake

BYU professor of anthropology, the late John Sorenson, theorized that the events of the Book of Mormon occurred in Mesoamerica. He estimated that the new world city of Jerusalem could have been along **Lake Atitlan's southwestern shore** (in modern-day Guatemala).¹³¹ **3 Nephi 9:7** says Jerusalem was one of the inundated cities where the "... waters have I caused to come up in the stead thereof, to hide their wickedness and abominations before my face..." Since John Sorenson's 1985 research, archeologists have found the remains of a **ruined ancient city buried underwater on the southwestern shore of Atitlan Lake**.¹³² Right where John thought it might be. This city is named *Sambaj* after the diver who found it. The sunken city includes about "30 ancient homes, a plaza, staircases, and even saunas."¹³³ It features "no fewer than 16 religious structures," including at least seven stelas ("standing stone markers that often signified power and authority in antiquity.")¹³⁴ Scholars analyzed the city's ceramic remains and estimated them to be between 200 BC and 300 AD.¹³⁵

Does this conclusively prove that the Lamanite city of the Book of Mormon, called "Jerusalem," is definitely at the bottom of Atitlan Lake in Guatemala? Not by a long shot. However, if I were to believe the critics, I would have to believe that Joseph Smith had the audacity to make up a book of scripture and say it was history. Then, in time, only to see more evidence pile up supporting the book's claims. **Now, that is unbelievable.**



Lake Atitlan, source: Simon Dannhauer via Adobe Stock



Source: Ruins at Samabaj. Image via zandersturgill.com.

Book of Mormon Archaeology Conclusion

→ Why do critics continue to say there is “no archeological evidence” for the Book of Mormon? Isn't that incorrect? **Wouldn't it be more accurate to say there is compelling, though not conclusive, archeological evidence?**

The amount of evidence in archeology for the Book of Mormon made me uncomfortable as a potential critic. The critical claim that there is “no archeological evidence” of the events in the Book of Mormon is not valid. The reality is that there is **meaningful evidence for the Book of Mormon in both the Old and New World**, despite the limitations of archeology (especially in the Americas).

DNA Limitations

Critics discuss DNA evidence regarding the Book of Mormon people in all-or-nothing, black-and-white terms. Why do they ignore the following [limitations of DNA evidence](#)?¹³⁶

Factor	Details	Relevance to the Book of Mormon
Founder Effect	A founder effect/event occurs when a few members of the original population start a new colony. A new "small population size" present in a larger gene pool may result in the colony having either "reduced genetic variation from the original population" or "a non-random sample of the genes in the original population."	The Book of Mormon depicts three small colonies of founders migrating to the Americas. Suppose the founders of these colonies encountered a larger population already present in the land and intermarried with them. In that case, the likelihood is high that this would result in an under sampling—maybe eliminating the founders' original genetic signature from the population entirely.
Genetic Bottleneck	A genetic bottleneck, or population bottleneck, is "an event that drastically reduces the size of a population" due to warfare, disease, natural disasters, or migration. This causes "a decrease in the gene pool of the population because many alleles, or gene variants, that were present in the original population are lost." The result is that "the remaining population has a very low level of genetic diversity, which means that the population as a whole has few genetic characteristics."	The destruction of the Nephite civilization in 400 AD is a population bottleneck. European colonization of the Americas resulted in large-scale deaths among Native Americans, which is yet another bottleneck. These bottleneck events greatly increase the likelihood that Lehi's DNA signature has been lost, assuming the Book of Mormon occurred in the Americas.
Genetic Drift	Genetic drift is the "random fluctuations in the number of gene variants in a population. Genetic drift occurs when variant forms of a gene, called alleles, increase and decrease by chance over time. These variations in the presence of alleles are measured as changes in allele frequencies."	Genetic drift occurs naturally when people inherit DNA from their parents. Book of Mormon peoples would have naturally experienced genetic drift like every other human population.

The founder effect, genetic bottleneck, and genetic drift are typical limitations of DNA testing.

Ancient populations¹³⁷ in **Iceland**, **Great Britain**, and the **Near East** are examples of people that existed but have **left no genetic profile that can be detected in modern populations**.

Doesn't the Book of Mormon suggest other people were in the promised land when Lehi's family arrived?¹³⁸ Or at least people with whom they integrated with over time?

- (3 Nephi 5:20) – “I am Mormon, and a **pure descendant of Lehi**.” (emphasis added)
- (Jacob 1:13-14) “Now the people which were not Lamanites were Nephites; nevertheless, they were called Nephites, Jacobites, Josephites, Zoramites, Lamanites, Lemuelites, and Ishmaelites. But I, Jacob, shall not hereafter distinguish them by these names, **but I shall call them Lamanites that seek to destroy the people of Nephi**, and **those who are friendly to Nephi I shall call Nephites**, or the people of Nephi, according to the reigns of the kings.” (emphasis added)
- (Alma 45:14) “**But whosoever remaineth**, and is not destroyed in that great and dreadful day, **shall be numbered among the Lamanites**.” (emphasis added)
- (Alma 17:26) “And after he had been in the service of the king three days, as he was with the **Lamanitish servants** going forth with their flocks to the place of water.” (emphasis added)
- (Alma 3:7) “And their brethren sought to destroy them, therefore they were cursed; and the Lord God set a mark upon them, yea, upon Laman and Lemuel, and also the sons of Ishmael, and **Ishmaelitish women**.” (emphasis added)

→ When Lehi’s family came to the Americas, several million indigenous people were likely already there.¹³⁹ If such a small group entered a massive native population, wouldn’t detecting their genes hundreds of years later be nearly impossible?

Between the genetic bottlenecking described in the Book of Mormon’s final battles and the further genetic bottlenecking of the European colonization of the Americas, **what are the odds of finding Lehi’s genes today?** Without more genetic information on Lehi/Sariah, Ishmael/his wife, and Zoram, what can we glean from genetic testing of populations today?

Book of Mormon Anachronisms

“A large number of anachronisms in the Book of Mormon have convinced many critics that the book is not historical or authentic scripture.” – Wasmormon.org¹⁴⁰

“The anachronisms have done nothing but increased. Science continues to punch holes in the Book of Mormon like Swiss cheese.” – Reddit user on ex/Mormon reddit board¹⁴¹

Anachronisms are things out of place and time. For a period, anachronisms were my greatest stumbling block against the Book of Mormon. Since the beginning, critics have lauded the list of anachronisms in the Book of Mormon as proof of its fabrication. At the time of Joseph Smith’s death in 1844, there were 89 alleged anachronisms in the Book of Mormon.¹⁴² This does not surprise me. If a **farmer or treasure-seeking fraudster in upstate New York is making up historical fiction, I would expect him to get things wrong** (a lot wrong). In fact, since 1844, critics have added another 116 potential anachronisms, totaling 205. **If that were the end of the story, then that would be 205 guesses that Joseph Smith got wrong.**

Then, I learned how many of the accused anachronisms against the Book of Mormon have been eliminated as we've learned more about ancient populations. In other words, evidence has emerged to confirm a significant number of details in the Book of Mormon. As of 2019, researchers have **eliminated 141 out of 205 (70%) of the anachronisms**. Another **26 cases (11%) were trending toward elimination**. Considering the limitations of archaeology in the Americas, these numbers are astounding. These findings were summarized in a FAIR Latter-day Saint Conference speech by Matt Roper titled "[Time Vindicates the Prophet](#)." (The presentation is provided below)



→ Why do critics feel comfortable **clinging to the few anachronisms they have left?**

Below is a list of some items critics used to mock the Book of Mormon for.

- Barley
- Corn
- Grapes
- Wine
- Silk
- Pearls
- Concrete
- Buildings
- Large cities
- Great civilizations
- Temples and palaces
- Highways
- Sunken cities
- Kings
- Egyptian names
- Non-biblical Hebrew names
- Metal plates
- Reformed versions of ancient Egyptian
- Geographic location of Nahom
- Lehi's travel itinerary
- A bountiful land in Arabia

Isn't it logical that **if Joseph Smith made up the Book of Mormon, it would prove more ludicrous over time?** Yet the opposite has happened. Why does **history confirm the details of the Book of Mormon?** How do critics account for this? Luck?

→ **Why do critics only mention the remaining 38 anachronisms (19%)? Then ignore the eliminated (or trending elimination) anachronisms (81%)?**

Why did Joseph Smith stick to his story when critics mocked the Book of Mormon for its account of sophisticated indigenous people with large cities, highways, and great civilizations? **Why didn't Joseph amend the Book of Mormon** when the critics told him that indigenous people couldn't have used concrete? Or had pearls? Or barley?

The critical consensus of Joseph Smith's day was that ancient people did not write on metal plates. LaRoy Sunderland said in his 1838 pamphlet "Mormonism Exposed and Refuted," "**How could brass be written on?**"¹⁴³ (emphasis added) In the 1887 book *The Golden Bible; or, The Book of Mormon: is it from God?* Reverend M.T. Lamb states, "**No such records were ever engraved upon golden plates,** or any other plates, in the early ages."¹⁴⁴ (emphasis added)

Unfortunately for those critics,

"Today **we have hundreds of examples of ancient writings on metal plates.** Ancient metal engraved plates have been found in gold, silver, and bronze ("brass" in the Book of Mormon). One bronze plate has been dated to the sixth century B.C. Some ancient Old World metal plates have been buried in stone boxes and some early American traditions included records being kept on metal plates and of ancestors who kept hieroglyphic records on thin gold plates." – Michael Ash, "[Book of Mormon Anachronisms Part 4: Metals and Metallurgy](#)," 2003, Fair Latter-day Saints (emphasis added).¹⁴⁵

→ How did Joseph Smith get so lucky about ancient people writing on metal plates? **Why use such an elaborate ploy to convince people he had ancient records if an old scroll would have done the trick?**

The list of anachronisms is ever-decreasing. Does this trouble the critics, or do they keep holding on to whatever leftover ground they have for as long as they can?

The tables below summarize the 200+ anachronisms historically used as arguments against the Book of Mormon, as shown in [Matt Roper's presentation](#).¹⁴⁶ In the table on the next page, **green is an eliminated anachronism, blue is trending toward elimination, and red is not yet eliminated.** I can only imagine the enduring faith of some of the early latter-day saints as the anachronisms piled higher and higher. There was **only "red" in 1830**, and **critics scorned the Saints and the prophet.**

But the story did not end there. Now, nearly 200 years after the publication of the Book of Mormon, research has eliminated far more anachronisms.

Update: Critics acknowledge that a startling number of items once considered anachronistic have since been eliminated. This includes many crucial ones like large, sophisticated civilizations. However, many critics still seem content to minimize the items "trending toward elimination" and maximize the outstanding anachronisms.

(Key for the table on the next page)

	Accused anachronism
	Anachronism trending toward elimination
	Eliminated anachronism

How it started.

Fortifications	Steel (NW)	New Names to Locations	Neas	Barns
No Warfare	Bellows (OW)	Not Much Fire	Ziff	Glass (OW)
No Wars of Conquest	Brass Early (OW)	Raw Meat	Money Names	Arts
Military Costumes	Brass (NW)	A Bountiful Site in Arabia	Rameumptum	Astronomy
Armor	Brass Early (NW)	Much Fruit	Com	Cement
Swords	Iron	Wild Honey	Kim	Archaeological Evidence
Swords Early	Iron Working (NW)	Timber	Nephi	Snakes Hedge Way
Steel Swords (OW)	Iron Practive Use of (NW)	Ore	Alma	Zeniff
Steel Swords (NW)	Abundance of Metal Ores	Mountain at Bountiful	Moroni	Chariots
Scimitars (OW)	Forges	Lehi's Ocean Route	Mormon	Pearls
Scimitars (NW)	Metal Money	Length of Jardite Voyage	Gadanton	Silk
Daggers	Gold Money	Pre-Columbian Sea Cross	Deseret	Linen
Axes	Silver Money	Feasts Customs Festivals	Liahona	Wheat
Javelins	Chains	Animal Sacrifice	Shazer	Barley
Spears	Early Metallurgy (NW)	600 Year Chronology	Honey Bees (NW)	Corn
Bow and Arrow	Gold Early	Killing Laban	Jarom	Grapes
Bow and Arrow Early	Silver Early	Seantum's Confession	Jonas	Wine
Quivers	Copper Early	Non Jerusalem Temples	Timothy	Salt
Bow of Fine Steel (OW)	Horse Pre-Columbian	Jews Write in Egyptian	Non-Biblical Hebrew Names	Highways
Fiery Darts	Horse with Man	Scripture in Egyptian	Egyptian Names	Leoprosy
Slings	Horse BM Times	Direction in Wilderness	Day Night and Day	Machinery
Shields	Ass	Elephants BM Times	Sunken Cities	Tools to Spin
Arm Shileds	Cow	Non Levite Priests	Great Tempest	Till Soil
Head Plates	Ox	Synogogues	Destruction By Fire	Hoe
Breastplates	Cattle	Metal Plates (OW)	Whirlwind	Thrash
Breastplates Copper/Brass	Goat	Israel Writing on Metal	Earthquake	Prune
Large Armies	Wild Goat	Writing on Metal Plates (NW)	Earthquakes in Mesoamerica	Plow
Large Army Casualties	Elephants and Man	Pre-Columbian Writing	Buildings Fall	Sickle
Set Time for Battle	Sacrifice not at Temple	Reformed Egyptian (OW)	Thick Darkness	Tools to Work Beasts
Wars of Extermination	Pre-Columbian Christians	Egyptian Language (NW)	Darkness Felt	Kings
Post Decipation Movement/Breathing	Sheep	Egyptian Inscriptions (NW)	Three Days of Darkness	Buildings
BM Battle Remains	Lion-like Animals	Hebrew Language (NW)	Inability to Light Fire	Plausible Geography (NW)
Trumpets	Moths	Hebrew Inscriptions (NW)	Earth Closing Up	Navigation
Elephants Pre-Columbian	Dragon-like Animals	Inscriptions with Book of Mormon Names (NW)	Earth Carried Up	Wild Beasts
Compass	Chickens	Inscriptions with Book of Mormon Texts (NW)	Destruction at Time of Christ	Omni
Jew Pre-exilic Term	Dogs	Hiding Up Records	Native Traditions	Mosiah
Cords	Land of Jerusalem	Inscribed Stone Monuments (NW)	Civiliation	Helaman
Ladders	Bethlehem Part of Land of Jerusalem	Sam	Large Cities	Ether
Tents	3 Days Journey	Josh	Cities Identified	Flocks and Herds
Rations	River in a Valley	Gid	Temples	Swine
Steel (OW)	River into Red Sea	Sheum	Palaces	Roads



How it's going.

Fortifications	Steel (NW)	New Names to Locations	Neas	Barns
No Warfare	Bellows (OW)	Not Much Fire	Ziff	Glass (OW)
No Wars of Conquest	Brass Early (OW)	Raw Meat	Money Names	Arts
Military Costumes	Brass (NW)	A Bountiful Site in Arabia	Rameumptum	Astronomy
Armor	Brass Early (NW)	Much Fruit	Com	Cement
Swords	Iron	Wild Honey	Kim	Archaeological Evidence
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Axes	Silver Money	Feasts Customs Festivals	Liahona	Wheat
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Spears	Early Metallurgy (NW)	600 Year Chronology	Honey Bees (NW)	Corn
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Bow and Arrow Early	Silver Early	Seantum's Confession	Jonas	Wine
Quivers	Copper Early	Non Jerusalem Temples	Timothy	Salt
Bow of Fine Steel (OW)	Horse Pre-Columbian	Jews Write in Egyptian	Non-Biblical Hebrew Names	Highways
Fiery Darts	Horse with Man	Scripture in Egyptian	Egyptian Names	Leoprosy
Slings	Horse BM Times	Direction in Wilderness	Day Night and Day	Machinery
Shields	Ass	Elephants BM Times	Sunken Cities	Tools to Spin
Arm Shileds	Cow	Non Levite Priests	Great Tempest	Till Soil
Head Plates	Ox	Synogogues	Destruction By Fire	Hoe
Breastplates	Cattle	Metal Plates (OW)	Whirlwind	Thrash
Breastplates Copper/Brass	Goat	Israel Writing on Metal	Earthquake	Prune
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Tents	3 Days Journey	Josh	Cities Identified	Flocks and Herds
Rations	River in a Valley	Gid	Temples	Swine
Steel (OW)	River into Red Sea	Sheum	Palaces	Roads

Book of Mormon Witnesses

Questions & Concerns

"When we were first told to publish our statement, **we felt sure the people would not believe it**, for the Book told of **a people who were refined and dwelt in large cities**; but the Lord told us that He would make it known to the people, and people should discover the ruins of the lost cities and abundant evidence of the truth of what is written in the Book." – DAVID WHITMER (1883)¹⁴⁷

There are **11 formal witnesses** of the Book of Mormon plates besides Joseph Smith. **8 of these witnesses** had a **physical experience** with the plates. They handled the plates, “hefted” them, thumbed through their leaves, and saw the engravings of the pages. The **3 witnesses**, Martin Harris, David Whitmer, and Oliver Cowdery, had a very different experience. They had a **supernatural visitation of an angel**. The angel first appeared to David Whitmer and Oliver Cowdery and later to Martin Harris.¹⁴⁸

- How do the critics explain away the testimony of the 11 witnesses? How do they explain the **non-supernatural** physical experience of the 8 witnesses? Then, how do they explain the **supernatural experience** of the 3 witnesses? **If they can theorize one type away, aren't they still stuck with the other type?**

For example, some critics guess (without evidence) that Joseph Smith fabricated metal plates with convincing, ancient-looking engravings to trick the 8 witnesses.

If that is true, then how do they explain the three witnesses' angelic visitation?

Other critics say (without evidence) that Joseph Smith was a **master hypnotist**.¹⁴⁹ That's how he got David Whitmer and Oliver Cowdery to see an angel and Martin Harris later on to see the same angel. **This theory would make Joseph among the greatest (if not the greatest) hypnotist the world has ever known**, long before the practice was in use.

- If I accept the hypnotist theory, aren't I still stuck with the physical, non-supernatural experience of the 8 witnesses?
- How realistic is it that Joseph Smith had such powerful hypnotic persuasion that he could make people **see, hear, and feel visions**, even without him present? Have the world's greatest hypnotists ever achieved a feat remotely close to that? **How could he produce the same angelic visitation in two instances for the 3 witnesses?**
- If Joseph is such a potent hypnotist, **why does he use that power to create Book of Mormon witnesses?** If Joseph is a fraud and a liar, **why not use those nearly mystical powers** to enrich himself? **He could have done almost anything with unnatural powers like that.**

Some critics try to brush aside the witnesses because they were friends and associates of Joseph Smith. Critics do so to explain why the witnesses “went along” with the scheme initially. **Well, which theory is it?** Did he **hypnotize them**, or were **they lying**? Are they

- co-conspirators, or were they duped? **It can't be both theories.**
- How do critics explain the “co-conspirators theory” when many witnesses later became disillusioned with Joseph Smith and left the Church? **Why would the witnesses continue to lie when they were no longer a part of the Church?** Keep lying when, in some cases, they had **every incentive to expose Joseph?**

The **Book of Mormon witnesses were well-regarded** in the communities they lived in.¹⁵⁰ How likely are 100% of the witnesses to lie for Joseph Smith? Some witnesses, like David Whitmer, left the Church and never returned.

→ Why did David Whitmer **maintain his testimony of the Book of Mormon for the rest of his life?**¹⁵¹ Didn't he have his **testimony etched** on his **gravestone**?



Photo provided to *findagrave.com* by Tom DeNardo on 07 Jul 2001.

→ **Several of the Book of Mormon witnesses left the Church but never denied their testimony.** Doesn't that only strengthen the case for the truth of their testimonies regarding the authenticity of the Book of Mormon?

I was inspired when I learned how much the witnesses sacrificed to maintain their testimony of the Book of Mormon. William McLellan relayed an experience in 1833 when one of the 8 witnesses, Hyrum Page, was tracked down by the Jackson County mob. **Under threat of death, Hyrum maintained his testimony.**

"[The mob] commenced beating and pounding him with whips and clubs. He begged, but there was no mercy. They said he was <a> damned Mormon, and they meant to beat him to death! But finally one then said to him, **if you will deny that damned book, we will let you go.** Said he, **how can I deny what I know to be true?** Then they pounded him again. When they thought he was about to breathe his last, they said to him, Now what do you think of your God, when he dont save you? Well said he, I believe in God—Well, said one of the most intelligent among them, I believe the damned fool will stick to it though we kill him. Let us let him go. But his life was nearly run out. He was confined to his bed for a length of time. So much for a man who knows for himself. Knowledge is beyond faith or doubt. It is **positive certainty.**"¹⁵²

The witnesses conducted formal interviews for the rest of their lives. Critics looked for any sign of falsehood in their story of the Book of Mormon. This is the reason why doubters requested repeated interviews. **If any witness had admitted that his testimony was a lie,** any anti-Mormon-friendly media would have celebrated him. It may have even become front-page news around the country. Likely, he could have made some money from denying his testimony. Yet, in dozens of formal interviews and hundreds of informal secondary interactions, **none of the witnesses ever denied their witness and testimony of the Book of Mormon.**¹⁵³ **None. Not one time.**

The 11 formal Book of Mormon **witnesses provided over 200 accounts** affirming their testimony. At best, there are 8 to 10 second-hand and third-hand accounts that attempt to reframe their testimonies as non-literal events of a spiritual nature.¹⁵⁴

Critics try to use the small handful of dubious accounts to discount the other 200. One such account is from a former pastor, John A. Clark, who considered Joseph Smith a fraud. He said a "gentleman in Palmyra" told him that Martin Harris saw the plates with the "eye of faith."¹⁵⁵ John Clark did not interview Martin Harris himself; he quoted someone he knew (unnamed). Critics jump on this instance of **hearsay** to say that the angelic experience did not happen.

If I were to believe John Clark's account, how would I explain these statements from Martin Harris? (Some in direct response to John Clark's claims)

"Gentlemen, do you see that hand? Are you sure you see it? Are your eyes playing a trick or something? No. Well, **as sure as you see my hand so sure did I see the angel and the plates.**" —Martin Harris, quoted in "Statement of William M. Glenn to O. E. Fischbacher," May 30, 1943, Cardston, Alberta, Canada, cited in Deseret News, October 2, 1943. Emphasis added.

"It is not a mere belief, but is a matter of knowledge. **I saw the plates and the inscriptions thereon. I saw the angel, and he showed them unto me.**" —Martin Harris, quoted in Robert Aveson, "Three Witnesses to the Book of Mormon," Deseret News, April 2, 1927. Emphasis added.

"Well, just **as plain as you see that chopping block, I saw the plates**; and sooner than I would deny it I would lay my head upon that chopping block and let you chop it off." —Martin Harris, quoted in "Statement of Comfort Elizabeth Godfrey Flinders to N. B. Lundwall," September 2, 1943, Ogden, Utah, cited in Assorted Gems of Priceless Value. Emphasis added.

"No man ever heard me in any way deny the truth of the Book of Mormon, [and] the administration of the angel that showed me the plates." – Martin Harris, quoted in "Harris to Emerson," January 1871.¹⁵⁶ Emphasis added.

In an interview with Anthony Metcalf, David Whitmer left no doubt about whether he saw with his "spiritual" or "natural" eyes.

"I was not under any hallucination . . . I saw with these eyes." (Palmyra Reflector, 19 March 1831; cited in The Saints' Herald, 28 January 1936. Emphasis added.)

In an 1849 interview with Jacob Gates, Mr. Gates asked Oliver Cowdery, "I want you to tell me the whole truth about your testimony concerning the Book of Mormon—the testimony sent forth to the world over your signature and found in the front of that book. Was your testimony based on a dream, was it the imagination of your mind, was it an illusion, a myth—tell me truthfully?" Here was Oliver's response:

"[The] Book of Mormon was translated by the gift and power of God. **My eyes saw, my ears heard, and my understanding was touched**, and I know that whereof I testified is true. **It was no dream, no vain imagination of the mind—it was real.**"¹⁵⁷ (emphasis added)

→ Didn't all three formal witnesses (and many of the eight) **bear testimony of the Book of Mormon on their deathbeds**?¹⁵⁸

Imagine how frustrating it was to be a witness of the Book of Mormon. Let's say I have a sacred experience; I bear testimony to it and include my name in the printing of the Book of Mormon. Then, detractors scrutinize my account for the rest of my life and interview me dozens of times. A couple of second-hand hear-say accounts claim that some unidentified person told them something different than what I actually said. So now I have to do more interviews. Then, **180 years later, critics only refer to a couple of inaccurate accounts, despite my every effort to bear a faithful testimony.**

Critics, I'm genuinely curious: **how many interviews would have been enough?**

→ **Are hundreds of interviews sufficient?** Is the **testimony of the witnesses on their deathbeds** and gravestones enough? **What more could the witnesses have done** to bear record of their testimony? **Is there anything that the witnesses could have said** that would convince the skeptics that they saw an angel and handled the plates? **Would anything satisfy the critics?**

→ Why do these critics use a small handful of problematic second and third accounts **at the expense of the hundreds of primary accounts and the overall narrative**? Is that what light and truth seekers do?

In the end, if the Book of Mormon is a fraud, then one of two things has to be true: 1) The 11 witnesses lied for Joseph Smith, or 2) Joseph swindled the witnesses very convincingly.

Why did the 11 formal witnesses never deny their experience with the plates and the angel if it was a fraud? Why did they reaffirm their testimonies over and over?¹⁵⁹ Why did they continue to lie for Joseph even when some were estranged from the Church?

If Joseph Smith had swindled the witnesses, how did he fabricate convincing enough plates? How did he get David Whitmer and Oliver Cowdery to see an angel? Then, how did he get Martin Harris to see the same angel later that day?

The CES Letter attempts to discredit the witnesses. Jeremy insinuates that the Book of Mormon witnesses are a **bunch of slack-jawed idiots**. A band of superstitious buffoons **incapable of knowing the difference between handling the plates and imagining handling the plates**. Backwater country yokels who were unaware of whether they saw an angel or not.

→ Weren't Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer, and Martin Harris well-regarded in their social circles? Wasn't **David Whitmer a city councilman and mayor** for a time in Richmond, Missouri? Wasn't **Martin Harris a successful, industrious farmer**? Wasn't **Oliver Cowdery, a clerk, teacher, lawyer, and newspaper editor**?

→ Beyond hundreds of individual affirmations, didn't **all 11 witnesses reaffirm their testimony** as a group on **two other occasions**?¹⁶⁰

Some witnesses left the Church during the Kirtland era and began criticizing Joseph Smith. Critics often reference this quote from Joseph to discredit the witnesses.

*"Such characters as McLellin, John Whitmer, David Whitmer, Oliver Cowdery, and Martin Harris, are too mean to mention; and we had liked to have forgotten them."*¹⁶¹

→ Two important points here. First, calling these men "mean" is a rather mild rebuke. Second, by making this rebuke, **Joseph** shows **absolutely no fear** of his witnesses **revealing his "scheme" or recanting their testimony**. How can he be so confident? If they are in on a fraud, doesn't he have every reason to keep them in the fold and speak kindly of them? Instead of impeaching the witnesses, as critics suggest, this quote from Joseph does the exact opposite.

After learning more about these men, I am moved by their sacrifice to build up the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the early days. Likewise, I am inspired by the witnesses who left the Church yet never faltered in their testimony despite every incentive to do so.

Informal witnesses

Beyond the 11 formal witnesses, there are **several unofficial witnesses to the Book of Mormon**. A summary of some of them is [listed below from Mormonr.org](#).¹⁶²

Name (Age)	Testimony
Emma Smith (24-25)	"The plates often lay on the table without any attempt at concealment, wrapped in a small linen table cloth, which I had given him to fold them in. I once felt of the plates , as they thus lay on the table, tracing their outline and shape. They seemed to be pliable like thick paper, and would rustle with a metallic sound when the edges were moved by the thumb , as one does sometimes thumb the edges of a book." (emphasis added).
Luck Mack Smith (52)	"I asked her (Emma Smith) if she saw the plates. She said no, it was not for her to see them, but she hefted and handled them."
Lucy Harris (35-36)	"Martin's wife had hefted [the plates] and felt them under [a] cover."
William Smith (17-18)	"In the winter of 1829 and thirty, the Book of Mormon, which is the translation of part of the plates he obtained, was published. He then showed the plates to my father and my brothers Hyrum and Samuel, who were witnesses to the truth of the book which was translated from them. I was permitted to lift them as they laid in a pillow-case; but not to see them, as it was contrary to the commands he had received. They weighed about sixty pounds according to the best of my judgment."
Catherine Smith Salisbury (14-17)	<p>"When Joseph was bringing the plates home from their hiding place to work on the translation he was followed to his father's very door at one time by some men who were determined to get "Joe Smith's Gold Plates" as they were called. Ever watchful for her brother's safety and hearing an unusual commotion outside Catherine flew to the door and threw it open just as Joseph came rushing up, panting for breath. He thrust a bundle into her arms, and in a gasping voice whispered hoarsely, "Take these quickly and hide them," then he disappeared into darkness. Closing the door Catherine ran hurriedly to the bedroom where she and Sophronia slept. Sophronia threw back the bedding and Catherine put the bundle on the bed, quickly replacing the bedding. Both of them lay down on the bed and pretended sleep. The mob, failing to find Joseph outside, returned to the house to search, but they did not disturb the girls since they appeared to be sleeping." (emphasis added)</p> <p>"Catherine Smith Salisbury then told me that while dusting up the room where the Prophet had his study she saw a package on the table containing the gold plates on which was engraved the story of the Book of Mormon. She said she hefted those plates and found them very heavy like gold and also rippled her fingers up the edge of the plates and felt that they were separate metal plates and heard the tinkle of sound that they made." (emphasis added)</p>
Josiah Stowell (57)	"... witness saw a corner of it; it resembled a stone of a greenish caste; should judge it to have been about one foot square and six inches thick ; he would not let it be seen by any one; the Lord had commanded him not; it was unknown to Smith, that witness saw a corner of the Bible, so called by Smith; told the witness the leaves were of gold; there were written characters on the leaves." (emphasis added)

Name (Age)	Testimony
Alvah Beaman (52)	"Joseph then took them [the plates] out, and hid them under the old cooper's shop, by taking up a board and digging in the ground and burying them. When they were taken from there, they were put into an old Ontario glass box. Old Mr. Beman [Alvah Moses Beaman] sawed off the ends, making the box the right length to put them in, and when they went in he said he heard them jink , but he was not permitted to see them. He told me so." (emphasis added)
Harrison Burgess (19)	"The next day while laboring in the field something seemed to whisper to me, 'Do you know the Book of Mormon is true?' My mind became perplexed and darkened, and I was so tormented in spirit that I left my work and retired into the woods. The misery and distress that I there experienced cannot be described. The tempter all the while seemed to say, 'Do you know the Book of Mormon is true?' I remained in this situation about two hours. Finally I resolved to know, by exercising faith similar to that which the brother of Jared possessed, whether I had proclaimed the truth or not, and commenced praying to the God of heaven for a testimony of these things. Suddenly a glorious personage clothed in white stood before me and exhibited to my view the plates from which the Book of Mormon was taken." (emphasis added).
Mary Musselman Whitmer (51)	John C. Whitmer, a grandson of Mary Musselman Whitmer, testified in the following language: "I have heard my grandmother say on several occasions that she was shown the plates of the Book of Mormon by a holy angel , whom she always called Brother Nephi. (She undoubtedly refers to Moroni, the angel who had the plates in charge.) . . . One evening, when (after having done her usual day's work in the house) she went to the barn to milk cows, she met a stranger carrying something on his back that looked like a knapsack. At first she was a little afraid of him, but when he spoke to her in a kind, friendly tone and began to explain to her the nature of the work which was going on in her house, she was filled with unexpressible joy and satisfaction. He then untied his knapsack and showed her a bundle of plates, which in size and appearance corresponded with the description subsequently given by the witnesses to the Book of Mormon. This strange person turned the leaves of the book of plates over, leaf after leaf, and also showed her the engravings upon them ; after which he told her to be patient and faithful in bearing her burden a little longer, promising that if she would do so, she should be blessed; and her reward would be sure, if she proved faithful to the end. The personage then suddenly vanished with the plates, and where he went, she could not tell." (emphasis added).
Alvah Beaman (52)	"Joseph then took them [the plates] out, and hid them under the old cooper's shop, by taking up a board and digging in the ground and burying them. When they were taken from there, they were put into an old Ontario glass box. Old Mr. Beman [Alvah Moses Beaman] sawed off the ends, making the box the right length to put them in, and when they went in he said he heard them jink , but he was not permitted to see them. He told me so." (emphasis added)

Mary Whitmer's account is fascinating. Several secondhand witnesses describe an [experience Mary relayed to them](#).¹⁶³ With a house full of people busy translating the Book of Mormon, she was left to pick up the extra work of cooking, cleaning, and laundry on her own. With the extra houseguests, it was especially burdensome. Amid her frustration, she received a visitation from a stranger who showed her the plates. After showing her the plates, the stranger vanished. The experience helped her endure a little longer.

→ How did Joseph Smith get Mary Whitmer to have an angelic visitation without his intervention or knowledge?

Evidence for Critical Theories

Questions & Concerns

“The Book of Mormon is the knot at the end of my faith rope.” – LYNN MCMURRY.¹⁶⁴

As a potential critic, I struggled with the skeptic's Book of Mormon **source theories** because they **lacked evidence**. No matter my complaints about God or the Church, **I could not reconcile the Book of Mormon**. It frustrated me because I could not explain it. At best, some **critic's theories have limited parallels** or random coincidences. **Whereas we have the Book of Mormon**. It actually exists. There is a place, a time in history, and a writer/translator. **Critics have yet to show sufficient evidence** beyond loose parallels that **Joseph Smith fabricated the Book of Mormon**.

The uncomfortable truth for critics is that **no negative evidence** supports their theories of how Joseph Smith created the Book of Mormon.

- **Where is the evidence** that Joseph Smith **forged metal plates**? Did he have experience and knowledge of metalworking? Did he have the resources? **Where are the eyewitnesses** who saw Joseph Smith etch characters onto metal plates?

Where is the evidence that he had or even knew of any of the books listed by critics as potential sources? Where are the witness statements that Joseph had sources with him during the translation?

- **What evidence** is there that Joseph Smith had access to **ancient maps of Arabia**?

Where is the evidence that Joseph Smith was familiar with Hebraisms? Or had an intimate knowledge of ancient Egyptian and Hebrew names?

- **Where is the evidence** that Joseph Smith had **help from other writers**? **Where are the co-conspirators** admitting that it was all a hoax?

How about any of the witnesses ever admitting that they lied? Did Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer, Martin Harris, and the rest ever confess that the angel and plates they saw were pretended?

One-off explanations (lacking evidence) of how Joseph Smith could have done one thing or another got repetitive and old to me. For example, here is a Reddit thread where a critic tries to undermine the incredible feat of the Book of Mormon.¹⁶⁵ I see these sorts of arguments all the time.

"Here are a few people who had very little formal education, but went on to do incredible things:

Mark Twain (famous writer)---Dropped out of school at 12 years old! He still managed to write 28 books, including The Adventures of Tom Sawyer!

William Shakespeare (famous writer)---dropped out of school at 13 years old. He wrote at least 39 plays.

Abraham Lincoln (President of USA)---1 Year of formal education.

Henry Ford (inventor and engineer)---8th grade education.

If Mark Twain and William Shakespeare could self-educate by reading books, so could Joseph Smith."

The issue is that these points only strengthen the Book of Mormon's claim of divine authenticity.

"Mark Twain (famous writer)---Dropped out of school at 12 years old! He still managed to write 28 books, including The Adventures of Tom Sawyer!"

Didn't Mark Twain write his first book, *The Innocents Abroad*, at **age 41**? After working as a **newspaper editor** for **eight years**?¹⁶⁶ Isn't that book **less than half the size** of the Book of Mormon?

"William Shakespeare (famous writer)---dropped out of school at 13 years old. He wrote at least 39 plays."

Aren't plays significantly shorter in word count than the Book of Mormon? Aren't Shakespeare's plays an **average of 22,595 words**,¹⁶⁷ whereas the Book of Mormon is 269,000? **Did Shakespeare write plays in one draft?**

"Abraham Lincoln (President of USA)---1 Year of formal education."

Abraham Lincoln was an incredible example of self-education. **Is there any evidence that Joseph Smith was a prolific reader** like Abraham Lincoln?

"Henry Ford (inventor and engineer)---8th grade education."

Interesting? What does this have to do with Joseph Smith?

"If Mark Twain and William Shakespeare could self-educate by reading books, so could Joseph Smith."

→ **Did any of these brilliant people** write a **269,000-word book** in **one draft** in **65 days**? Is there any evidence that Joseph Smith read or even had access to a library of books he would have needed before 1829?

Here is another example from critic "Zelph on the Shelf" on X (Twitter)¹⁶⁸:

"William Faulkner wrote 'As I Lay Dying' in 6 weeks without a single alteration to the draft. Both 'Clockwork Orange' and 'On the Road' were written in 3 weeks. 'Dr. Jekyll and Mr Hyde' was written in 3 days."

Same story as before, don't these authorship points only strengthen the case for the Book of Mormon?

"William Faulkner wrote 'As I Lay Dying' in 6 weeks without a single alteration to the draft."

Isn't **As I Lay Dying 56,000 words**?¹⁶⁹ Wasn't it **William Faulkner's 3rd published book**?¹⁷⁰ Wasn't he **college-educated** and had plenty of **experience in writing** before this book?

"Both 'Clockwork Orange' and 'On the Road' were written in 3 weeks."

Weren't Jack Kerouac¹⁷¹ (author of *On the Road*) and Anthony Burgess¹⁷² (author of *Clockwork Orange*) already **prolific writers** before these works? Wasn't **On the Road** the final version of a book Jack Kerouac had **been trying to write for years**?¹⁷³ Didn't Jack's **publisher reject the first manuscript** and request Jack to revise it? **Isn't Clockwork Orange 53,000 words**?¹⁷⁴ Weren't both Jack Kerouac and Anthony Burgess **University educated**?

'Dr. Jekyll and Mr Hyde' was written in 3 days."

Isn't *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* **28,668 words**? Wasn't the **first draft** of the book written in 3 days, **discarded**, and **re-written** in the version we know today in **3 weeks**?¹⁷⁵ Wasn't the author, Robert Stevenson, **university-educated**?

→ Did any of these authors have limited formal education and write a 269,000-word book in one draft in 65 days as their first published work?

Brian Hales offers an **excellent comparison of authors to Joseph Smith**. He compares the **author's age, education, book word count, book complexity, and composition timeline**. In nearly every category, **Joseph Smith is the outlier**. When combining all the factors, **no one else** is like him.¹⁷⁶

The truth is that there is **plenty of evidence** for the **divine claims** of the **Book of Mormon**. I grew leery of critics minimizing positive evidence for the Book of Mormon while maximizing unsubstantiated negative theories. The **evidence for the Book of Mormon is persuasive**; however, it is also not irrefutable. Yet, isn't the archeological evidence interesting? Doesn't the Hebraisms and other linguistic evidence make a case for the Book of Mormon? Aren't the testimonies of the witnesses to the Book of Mormon thought-provoking? Don't the eliminated anachronisms bolster the claims of the Book of Mormon? How believable is it that a 23-year-old farm boy created a book with 600 geographical references that are spatially consistent? A book with 200 name characters, several plot lines, three migrations, and a currency system? Isn't the Book of Mormon quite complex? Do critics want me to ignore the mountain of evidence **and focus on the molehill of their contradictory parallels**?

So, the question that started this letter remains.



Where did the Book of Mormon come from?

After years of interacting with critics' ideas about the Book of Mormon's creation, **I saw more and more holes**. Critics suggest **several theories**, but those theories **contradict one another**. Any one theory sounds reasonable by itself. But as soon as I attempt to create a plausible narrative, **it all falls apart**. Critics do not seem to understand that **contradictory theories are mutually debilitating** instead of reinforcing. I started to see that many critics start with naturalistic assumptions ("angels don't give plates to men") and attempt to reverse-engineer how Joseph Smith created the Book of Mormon.

Critics have no evidence of the Book of Mormon's creation; they only have theories. Below is my attempt to summarize the collection of critical, naturalistic theories about the creation of the Book of Mormon.

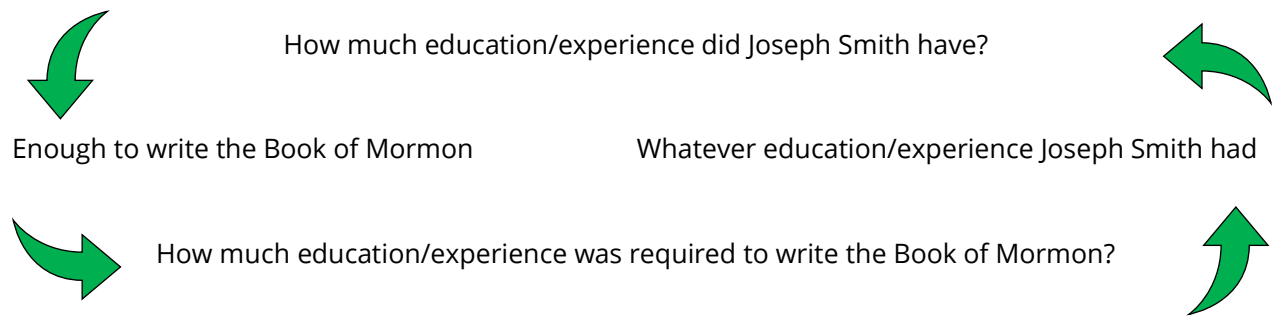
Joseph Smith was a **creative genius**. He had, after all, a *homeschool education* and maybe 2-3 years of formal education. With this type of education, he would have learned *basic arithmetic, writing, and reading skills*. A poor farm boy with little formal education to dictate a 269,000-word religious text in one draft *would have to be a creative genius*. *He got the idea of the Book of Mormon in 1828 from his friend Sidney Rigdon*. Never mind that *he didn't meet Rigdon until after the Book of Mormon publication in 1830*. Even though Joseph Smith had never met Sidney Rigdon, Sidney got a copy of an unfinished and unpublished book, the *Spaulding Manuscript*, and gave it to Joseph. From it, *Joseph liked the part about a group of Romans who were blown off course and landed in America*. Then, in 1829, Joseph asked his Mom's 3rd cousin, Oliver Cowdery, to contribute more elements to the Book of Mormon. Oliver chose elements from the *View of the Hebrews* that he had a copy of and would have read several times. *They borrowed unique elements from the View of the Hebrews, like the destruction of Jerusalem, the scattering of Israel, traveling on the ocean, encountering the valley of a great river, a man standing on a wall warning people, pride denounced, idolatry and human sacrifice, and long wars breaking out between groups of people*. They borrowed these high-level, superficial elements from the *View of the Hebrews* so as not to give themselves away for 75 years. Then Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery cracked open their copy of the *First Book of Napoleon*. The duo spent days finding words and phrases from 25 different pages to construct the same words and phrases on several pages of the *Book of Mormon*. After they finished assembling scattered phrases from the *First Book of Napoleon*; they dusted off their old textbook, the *Late War Between the United States and Great Britain*. Phrases like "stripling," "curious workmanship," and "rod of iron" in the book struck Joseph Smith. He used the phrases in completely different contexts in the *Book of Mormon* because he liked them so much. Then Joseph Smith wove in scriptures from the Bible and zingers from his local pastors. Hebraisms naturally came to him as a **creative genius**. He inserted several Hebraic chiasmus poetic structures, though that style was not used in his day. He included a beautiful and complex 30-verse chiasmus in Alma 36, with Jesus Christ at the center of the poem. Ancient literary forms came naturally to him as a **creative genius**. *He had access to ancient maps no one else had access to* with the words *Nahom* or *Nihm* in *Arabia*. With those same maps, *he understood the geography of the Red Sea and Arabia* at the time of Lehi's journey in 600 BC. *He correctly guessed the existence of a bountiful land in modern-day Oman* with trees, fruit, honey, ore, cliffs, and sea shores. Joseph was familiar with the circumstances of ancient Israel around 600 BC, long before scholars were. *He had enough experience in olive tree cultivation* in upstate New York (although no such cultivation is known of) to write the allegory of Jacob 5. *He had a complex map of the promised land in his mind* to give the *Book of Mormon* consistent geography. The *Book of Mormon* contains 345 names, including 86 place names. Some of these names he took from the Bible. For others, *he used names of places around upstate New York that didn't exist yet*. The rest he made up. *He borrowed Moroni and "Comoro" from a favorite pirate book about Captain Kidd*. The parallels between Hebrew and Egyptian, on the one hand, and the unique names in the *Book of Mormon*, on the other hand, are coincidental. He defied the consensus beliefs of his day about the ancient American people, which later turned out to be true because he had good instincts. His book outlined a civilized society with great cities, temples, large armies, etc. *Luckily, most of his*

*guesses have panned out or are trending that way. Fortunately, archeologists eliminated anachronisms like concrete and barley in the Americas and metal plates. Joseph forgot that Alma is a woman's name in Latin when he named a male prophet Alma in the Book of Mormon. Luckily for him, researchers later discovered that Alma was an ancient Hebrew male name. In the Book of Mormon, Joseph could dictate different literary styles. He created at least eight distinctive voices and styles for Nephi, Jacob, Alma, Abinadi, Nephi (son of Helaman), Mormon, Moroni, and Jesus Christ. All of these styles were different from his own. Joseph had to fill in the gaps because the source material available to him contributed so little to the Book of Mormon. He filled the rest of the Book of Mormon with beautiful sermons, allegories, parables, doctrines, and principles. Teachings with the complexity and simplicity necessary to touch millions of people for almost 200 years. The doctrines outlined in the Book of Mormon resolve some of the most complex theological issues in Christianity. He was familiar with the literature on those issues. As a **creative genius**, he was good at solving spiritual problems on the fly. Mostly homeschooled, Joseph Smith received the education required to dictate the Book of Mormon. He pulled this off by studying the Bible, receiving tutoring from his brother Hyrum between long hours working on the family farm, participating in local religious activities, family storytelling gatherings, a brief stint as an exhorter at Methodist meetings, and possible involvement in a local juvenile debate club. Joseph Smith had the requisite ancient maps. He had mounds of books, mostly memorized or available during translation. He had time to read up on all that material when he was seven years old and bedridden after his leg surgery in 1813. He hid this source material, perhaps inside his hat. He either hid all this source material from his scribes and other interested parties, or they were part of the scheme, too. Because of the excitement about the gold plates, Joseph Smith had to finish the translation quickly. He managed to dictate/write the book on a short deadline because he worked great under pressure. The Book of Mormon prophesies that there would be three witnesses. Fortuitously, Joseph found three men willing to lie to fulfill the prophecy. Oliver Cowdery, Martin Harris, and David Whitmer were so involved in the scheme that they never admitted it. Even after their estrangement from the church. The witnesses maintained the narrative even when they, later in life, had every incentive to call out any falsehood in the coming forth of the Book of Mormon. Other witnesses also maintained the narrative of the plates for the rest of their lives despite their knowledge of its forgery. Joseph Smith was unfamiliar with Book of Mormon passages because he was so creative. He was so brilliant that he could not recall what he had made. He received comfort from its pages for the rest of his life because it was that good. The Book of Mormon is multi-valency. That is, of course, because **Joseph Smith was a creative genius**.*

→ Isn't "creative genius" code for "I have no idea"?

→ Critics, is it not fair to say that the **Book of Mormon is an anomaly** at the very least?

The circular visual below is the **best critical natural explanation** I've ever heard for how Joseph Smith created the Book of Mormon.



Once I accepted that an angel gave Joseph Smith metal plates and that he translated those plates by the **gift and power of God**, everything started to make sense to me. **When I believed that Joseph Smith was a fraud** (pious or not), **I could not reconcile that belief with the evidence.** Those theories only left me more confused. **If critics accept the possibility of the divine, everything else in the evidence will start to make sense to them.**

For the sincere skeptic, the Book of Mormon should be a wonder. It seems to **emerge from nowhere.**

“People have readily assumed the Book of Mormon was within Joseph Smith’s writing ability, when it’s actually questionable how well it was within his **reading ability.**” (emphasis added) – LDS Historian DON BRADLEY¹⁷⁷

“All the scriptures, including the Book of Mormon, **will remain in the realm of faith.** Science will not be able to prove or disprove holy writ. However, enough plausible evidence will come forth to prevent scoffers from having a field day, but not enough to remove the requirement of faith.” (emphasis added) – NEAL A. MAXWELL¹⁷⁸

“**For 179 years this book has been examined and attacked, denied and deconstructed, targeted and torn apart like perhaps no other book in modern religious history—perhaps like no other book in any religious history. And still it stands.** Failed theories about its origins have been born and parroted and have died—from Ethan Smith to Solomon Spaulding to deranged paranoid to cunning genius. None of these frankly pathetic answers for this book has ever withstood examination because there is no other answer than the one Joseph gave as its young unlearned translator. In this I stand with my own great-grandfather, who said simply enough, “No wicked man could write such a book as this; and no good man would write it, unless it were true and he were commanded of God to do so.” (emphasis added) – JEFFREY R. HOLLAND ([Safety for the Soul](#), October 2009 General Conference)

“I do not find it possible to doubt that Joseph Smith was an authentic prophet. Where in all of American history can we find his match? I can only attribute his genius or daemon his uncanny recovery of elements in ancient Jewish theurgy that had ceased to be available either to normative Judaism or to Christianity, and that survived only in esoteric traditions unlikely to have touched Smith directly. As an unbeliever, I marvel at his intuitive understanding of the permanent religious dilemmas of our country.”¹⁷⁹ – (Emphasis added) Non-Latter-day Saint American literary critic, Yale Professor of humanities, HAROLD BLOOM.

“The Book of Mormon should rank among the great achievements of American literature.”¹⁸⁰ – (emphasis added) Non-Latter-day Saint historian DANIEL WALKER HOWE

When reviewing the totality of evidence, I've concluded that the Book of Mormon should not exist naturally for two primary reasons:

1). Joseph Smith's education and experience

The hypothetical plausible scenario - A **gifted writer/orator** with **decades of experience** could maybe write something like the Book of Mormon. Perhaps a **scholar** with **extensive education** in writing, dictation, and religion could do it. At a minimum, they would need sufficient education and experience **in ancient Egyptian and Hebrew languages, Israelite traditions, Arabian geography, Mesoamerican culture, battle tactics, and olive tree cultivation**. They need to be clever enough to create **distinct voices** in their religious text even though other famous authors during the same period could not do that. They would also need **mounds of source material, including ancient maps beyond their ability to access**. They would need to reference these various sources often. The hypothetical historical religious book would **take years, countless drafts, and multiple editors**.

The reality - Joseph Smith was **23 years old** when he translated the Book of Mormon in **one draft** in about **65 days**.

Despite the critics' attempts to explain how he did it, **their models do not fit the facts**. In addition to being **young and inexperienced**, Joseph was not **“inclined toward books”**¹⁸¹ and **did not have much experience in writing**.¹⁸² We have **no documented public sermons** he gave before 1829,¹⁸³ and **contemporary critics** in his day labeled **Joseph as an ignoramus**.

Update: Critics held on to the uneducated farmer Joseph writing a “non-sense” Book of Mormon narrative until people started reading it. When that happened, it quickly became apparent how complex the Book of Mormon was. So, over the years, critics have shifted their story to the “genius” theory that is more common today.

2). Widely believed information and limited available resources in 1829

The Book of Mormon defies beliefs held in Joseph Smith's day. Details about Native Americans, Arabia, ancient Israel, metal plates, Mesoamerica, ancient languages, and Christian doctrine differ from what was conventional in 1829. The **Church's critics have**

ridiculed the Book of Mormon for almost 200 years. Even though the **evidence keeps piling up in favor of the Book of Mormon** and Joseph Smith's claims. When a critic mocks some aspect of the Book of Mormon, it only bolsters its divine origin because **time proves critical theories wrong.** Critics seem content holding on **to an increasingly smaller list of unanswered questions as time passes.**

The resources that support the Book of Mormon, which were not available to Joseph Smith, are staggering. Since 1966, most critical claims against the Book of Mormon have been debunked. **Joseph Smith was either a prophet of God or the world's greatest guesser.**

→ Critics, what stronger evidence could you have? What does evidence look like? What is good enough evidence?

“It is not just that the Book of Mormon teaches us truth, though it indeed does that. It is not just that the Book of Mormon bears testimony of Christ, though it indeed does that, too. But there is something more. **There is a power in the book which will begin to flow into your lives the moment you begin a serious study of the book.** You will find greater power to resist temptation. You will find the power to avoid deception. You will find the power to stay on the strait and narrow path.” (emphasis added) – EZRA TAFT BENSON ([The Book of Mormon—Keystone of Our Religion](#), October 1986 general conference)

How did Joseph Smith know?

Questions & Concerns

“**[Joseph Smith] was an authentic religious genius**, unique in our national history... Smith’s insight could have come only from a remarkably apt reading of the Bible, and there I would locate **the secret of his religious genius**. ...So strong was this act of reading that it broke through all the orthodoxies—Protestant, Catholic, Judaic—and found its way back to elements that **Smith rightly intuited had been censored out of the stories** of the archaic Jewish religion. **Smith’s radical sense of the theomorphic patriarchs and anthropomorphic gods is an authentic return to J, or the Yahwist, the Bible’s first author.**” – (emphasis added) Non-Latter-day Saint American literary critic, Yale Professor of humanities, HAROLD BLOOM¹⁸⁴

This section covers the items in the “other” category of criticism and evidence of the Book of Mormon and Joseph Smith. I chose only a handful of interesting examples. If this section included everything, this letter would be inordinately long. Is anything in this section absolute proof that Joseph was a prophet? Not quite. However, so much of what is in this section **goes unnoticed or is disregarded by non-believers**. Some of the evidence cited in this section is **highly inconvenient for critics**.

Enoch

In 1830, Joseph Smith took five verses from the Bible and turned them into 110 verses in Moses 6-7. These 110 verses present serious problems for critics. **Moses 6-7 may be the greatest corroborating evidence** (beyond the Book of Mormon) of Joseph’s role as a revelator. To an 1830s critic of Joseph Smith, the added scriptures regarding Enoch likely seemed like nonsense or blasphemy—the incoherent ramblings of a delusional fraudster.

Then, various **books of Enoch came to light**, including the “**Dead Sea Scrolls**” in the **1940s**. [The parallels between Joseph’s Enoch and ancient Enochic literature](#) are astounding.

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→ What are the odds of Joseph Smith making up the details in Moses that match so much of the Enochic literature?

Why do critics ignore Joseph Smith’s Enoch?

Enoch in the Book of Moses	Enoch in the Dead Sea Scrolls
<p>Moses 6:31</p> <p>“Why is it that I have found favor in thy sight, and am but a lad, and all the people hate me; for I am slow of speech; wherefore am I thy servant?”</p> <p>*Note that Joseph Smith uses the word “lad” in no other book of scripture or personal writing.</p>	<p>3 Enoch¹⁸⁶</p> <p>“And because I was the youngest among them and a lad amongst them with respect to days, months, and years, therefore they called me lad.”</p>
<p>Moses 6:34</p> <p>“Behold my Spirit is upon you, wherefore all thy words will I justify; and the mountains shall flee before you, and the rivers shall turn from their course; and thou shalt abide in me, and I in you; therefore walk with me.”</p> <p>*Note that nowhere in the Bible is there an instance of a river changing course.”</p>	<p>Madaean Enoch¹⁸⁷</p> <p>“The [Supreme] Life replied, Arise, take thy way to the source of the waters, turn it from its course. . . At this command Tavril [the angel speaking to Enoch] indeed turned the pure water from its course.”</p>
<p>Moses 6:38</p> <p>“There is a strange thing in the land; a wild man hath come among us.”</p>	<p>Book of Giants¹⁸⁸</p> <p>“The wild man they call [me].”</p>

Enoch in the Book of Moses	Enoch in the Dead Sea Scrolls
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<p>Moses 6:38</p> <p>"There is a strange thing in the land; a wild man hath come among us."</p>	<p>Book of Giants¹⁹¹</p> <p>"The wild man they call [me]."</p>
<p>Moses 6:40</p> <p>"there came a man unto him, whose name was Mahijah, and said unto him: Tell us plainly who thou art, and from whence thou comest?"</p> <p>*Note that Mahijah, the only other named character in the Enoch story of the Book of Moses, is only noted for asking direct questions to Enoch.</p>	<p>Book of Giants¹⁹²</p> <p>The gibborim send one of their fellows named Mahujah to "consult Enoch in order to receive an authoritative interpretation of the visions."</p> <p>"[Then] all the [gibborim and the nephilim] . . . called to [Mahujah] and he came to them. They implored him and sent him to Enoch, the celebrated scribe and they said to him: "Go. . . and tell him to [explain to you] and interpret the dream. . ."</p>
<p>Moses 7:2</p> <p>"As I was journeying, and stood upon the place Mahujah, and cried unto the Lord."</p>	
<p>Moses 6:32</p> <p>"And the Lord said unto Enoch: Go forth and do as I have commanded thee, and no man shall pierce thee. Open thy mouth, and it shall be filled, and I will give thee utterance."</p>	<p>Madaean Enoch¹⁹³</p> <p>"Little Enoch, fear not. You dread the dangers of this world; I am come to you to deliver you from them. Fear not the wicked, and be not afraid that the floods will rise up on your head; for their efforts will be vain: it shall not be given them to do any harm to thee."</p>

Enoch in the Book of Moses	Enoch in the Dead Sea Scrolls
<p>Moses 6:32</p> <p>"And the Lord said unto Enoch: Go forth and do as I have commanded thee, and no man shall pierce thee. Open thy mouth, and it shall be filled, and I will give thee utterance."</p>	<p>2 Enoch 39:5¹⁹⁴</p> <p>"It is not from my own lips that I am reporting to you today, but from the lips of the Lord I have been sent to you. For you hear my words, out of my lips, a human being created exactly equal to yourselves; but I have heard from the fiery lips of the Lord."</p>
<p>Moses 7:13</p> <p>"the roar of the lions was heard out of the wilderness"</p>	<p>Book of Giants¹⁹⁵</p> <p>"the roar of the wild beasts has come and they bellowed a feral roar."</p>
<p>Moses 6:46</p> <p>"For a book of remembrance we have written among us, according to the pattern given by the finger of God; and it is given in our own language."</p>	<p>Book of the Giants¹⁹⁶</p> <p>Correspondingly, in the Book of the Giants, a book in the form of "two stone tablets" is given by Enoch to Mahujah to stand as a witness of "their fallen state and betrayal of their ancient covenants."</p> <p>Jubilees 10:17¹⁹⁷</p> <p>"For Enoch's office was ordained for a testimony to the generations of the world, so that he should recount all the deeds of generation unto generation, till the day of judgment."</p>
<p>Moses 6:47</p> <p>"And as Enoch spake forth the words of God, the people trembled, and could not stand in his presence"</p>	<p>Book of Giants¹⁹⁸</p> <p>The leaders of the mighty warriors "bowed down and wept in front of [Enoch]."</p>
<p>Moses 6:52</p> <p>"If thou wilt turn unto [God], and hearken unto my voice, and believe, and repent of all thy transgressions"</p>	<p>Book of Giants¹⁹⁹</p> <p>"Now, then, unfasten your chains [of sin]. . . and pray."</p>
<p>Moses 7:38</p> <p>"But behold, these . . . shall perish in the floods; and behold, I will shut them up; a prison have I prepared for them"</p>	<p>Book of Giants²⁰⁰</p> <p>"he imprisoned us and has power [ov]er [us]."</p>

The Book of Abraham²⁰¹

When criticizing the Book of Abraham, critics focus on the translation method. To this day, critics and apologists debate which parts of the papyri were translated²⁰², whether it was a translation or a revelation²⁰³, and the length of the papyri.²⁰⁴ Most of what Egyptologists know today about ancient Egyptians comes from the Eighteenth dynasty around 1500 BC, 1300 years before Joseph Smith's 200 BC papyri.²⁰⁵

What is more interesting to me is the actual **text itself**. Few critics seem to engage with the text of the Book of Abraham. Like Enoch in Moses 6-7, what we've learned about Abraham since the 1840s is incredible, considering what Joseph revealed about Abraham in the Pearl of Great Price. In [Brett McDonald's YouTube series, "LDS Truth Claims,"](#)²⁰⁶ he takes two videos to cover the **24 items in the Book of Abraham that Joseph Smith would not know or assume from the Bible or from 1835-1842 resources**. These items have later been found or confirmed in other apocryphal sources, like the *Book of Jubilees* (published in 1850), the *Testament of Abraham* (published in 1892), and the *Apocalypse of Abraham* (published in 1897).

Parallels between apocryphal sources (post-1842) and the Book of Abraham (pre-1842)

- ✓ The existence of a record written by Abraham (the Bible provides no hint that a Book of Abraham ever existed);
 - ✓ Abraham's literacy and his possession of ancient records (Abr. 1:28)
 - ✓ Abraham's desire to be one who "possesses great knowledge" (Abr. 1:1)
 - ✓ His desire to be a High Priest, holding the priesthood, is described as "the right belonging to the fathers" (Abr. 1:1-3)
 - ✓ His successful quest to find God (Abr. 1:1-3 and 2:12)
 - ✓ The rebellion of his fathers, who had once received the priesthood but turned to idol worship, according to Egyptian practices (Abr. 1:4-10)
 - ✓ The practice of human sacrifice, including the sacrifice of children, as part of the practice of local idolaters in Chaldea (Abr. 1:7-11)
 - ✓ The killing of people who refused to worship idols of wood or stone (Abr. 1:11)
 - ✓ The violent seizing of Abraham by the local priest to slay Abraham also as a human sacrifice (Abr. 1:12; Facs. 1)
 - ✓ The role of Terah, Abraham's father, in seeking to have Abraham killed (Abr. 1:30)
 - ✓ The use of an altar fashioned like a lion couch (Facs. 1), described as a "bedstead" (Abr. 1:13), in the attempt to kill Abraham
 - ✓ Description of canopic jars in front of the altar in Facsimile 1 as representing pagan gods (Abr. 1:13), and a reference to the "god of Pharaoh" (Abr. 1:6)
 - ✓ The miraculous delivery of Abraham from death by the power of God, who sent an angel to free Abraham after Abraham cried to the Lord (Abr. 1:15; 2:13)
 - ✓ The destruction of the altar and idols by the Lord (Abr. 1:20)
-

✓	Abraham's possession of sacred records from the past (Abr. 1:28, 31)
✓	A famine in Chaldea, before Abraham went to Canaan (Abr. 1:29,30; 2:1)
✓	The repentance of Terah, Abraham's father, and his subsequent return to idolatry after the famine abated (Abr. 1:30; 2:5)
✓	Abraham's age of 62 years when he departed out of Haran (Abr. 2:14 - Gen. 12:4 gives 75 years)
✓	The winning of souls in Haran, apparently by Abraham's preaching, who followed Abraham into Canaan (Abr. 2:15)
✓	Building an altar in the land of Jershon before entering Canaan, where Abraham prayed for relief from the famine for the benefit of his father's family (Abr. 2:17) - two other altars would later be built (Abr. 2:18-20)
✓	Abraham's possession of the Urim and Thummim, given to him by God (Abr. 3:1)
✓	Abraham's knowledge of stars, planets, and astronomy was obtained through revelation (Abr. 3:1-18)
✓	Abraham teaching astronomy in Egypt
✓	Revelation to Abraham about the premortal existence of spirits or intelligences in the presence of God, including information on a great council in heaven where plans were established for this earth and our mortal trial here (Abr. 3:18-28)

→ Why do critics exclude the text of the Book of Abraham in their criticism of it?

Deuteronomists Reforms

In the Old Testament (2 Kings 22-23), **King Josiah instituted several reforms** around 620 BC. Non-latter-day saint biblical scholar Margaret Barker highlights the **complicated consequences of the reforms**.²⁰⁷ King Josiah and his reformers ("**The Deuteronomists**") changed the Israelite religion and temple worship forever.

In Lehi's day, the book of Deuteronomy would have been a newer book to him.²⁰⁸ The reforms potentially removed elements from the temple and religion that alluded to a **sacrificial Messiah**, the divine feminine (**the tree of life** or menorah), and the **destruction of Jerusalem**.

→ How did Joseph Smith understand the complex religious issues in Lehi's day a generation after the aggressive King Josiah reforms?

→ Isn't it interesting that Lehi focuses on the **destruction of Jerusalem, the tree of life, and a suffering Messiah**? The teachings that had been potentially recently removed from the Israelite religion?

"The **original temple tradition** was that Yahweh, the Lord, **was the Son of the God Most High**, and was present on earth as the Messiah. This means that **the older religion in Israel would have taught about the Messiah**. Thus finding Christ in the Old Testament is exactly what we should expect, though obscured by incorrect reading of the scriptures. This is, I

suggest, **one aspect of the restoration of 'the plain and precious things, which have been taken away from them'** (1 Ne. 13:40)."²⁰⁹ – (emphasis added) Margaret Barker

How did Joseph Smith nail the family dynamic between Lehi/Nephi and Laman/Lemuel? Laman and Lemuel complain about Lehi being a visionary man; then they claim that the Jews in Jerusalem were righteous because they had followed the law. Wouldn't that be precisely what they would say if they were in the Deuteronomist camp?

How did Joseph Smith guess the tension between the Deuteronomists and the traditionalists like Lehi?

- Does this prove the Book of Mormon is an ancient record of people from Jerusalem who left and came to the Americas? It does not. But **how did Joseph Smith keep getting these details right** decades **before** scholars knew them?

Sacrifices Outside of Jerusalem

Why does 1st Nephi talk about offering a sacrifice unto the Lord in the wilderness? Doesn't Deuteronomy 12 state that sacrifices are only offered at the temple?

After the Deuteronomist reforms, sacrifices are only offered at the temple. So it's curious that Lehi, as soon as he was "**three days in the wilderness...** built an altar of stones, and made an offering unto the Lord." (1 Nephi 2:6-7; emphasis added) Why would Joseph Smith include this detail?

- An ancient document called "**The Temple Scroll**" was found among the Dead Sea Scrolls. It came to light over **100 years after the publication of the Book of Mormon**. How crazy is it that the *Temple Scroll* reiterates that **sacrifices outside the temple are allowed** if getting back to Jerusalem is more than a **three-day journey**?

"You shall not slaughter a clean ox or sheep or goat in all your towns, **near to my temple (within) a distance of a three days' journey**; nay, but inside my temple you shall slaughter it, making it a burnt offering or a peace offering, and you shall eat and rejoice before me at the place on which I shall choo{se} to put my name." (11QT 52:13-16; emphasis added)²¹⁰

How did Joseph Smith figure this out?

Thieves vs. Robbers

In **modern English**, the words **thief** and **robber** are generally **used interchangeably**. Not so in the ancient Near East. **Anciently**, there was a **significant legal difference** between how to handle a **thief** and a **robber**.²¹¹ In the Book of Mormon era, a thief was someone within the community who stole from his/her neighbor. A thief would be subject to a system of local laws and punishments. By contrast, a **robber is an outsider**. An outsider may pose a threat to the community. Thus, a **robber may require military intervention**. The justification for military action is that removing the threat of robbers is better than having them overrun the city or nation.

→ Isn't it fascinating that there is a clear distinction between thieves and robbers in the Book of Mormon?

Take a look at the interaction between Laban and the sons of Lehi:

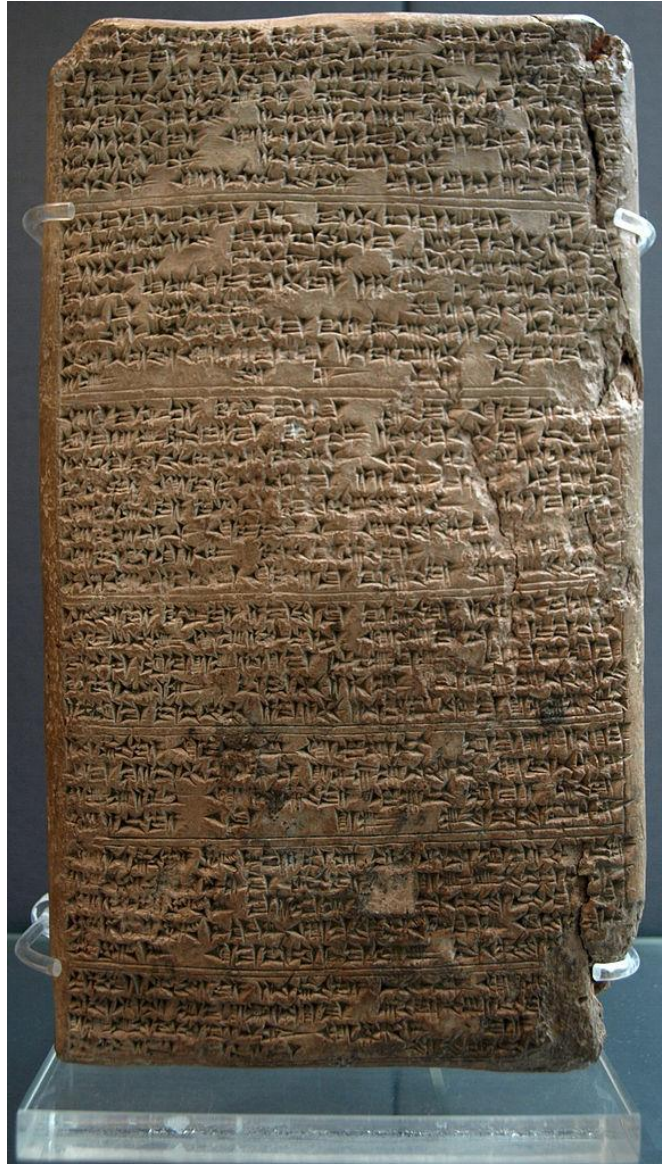
"Laban was angry, and thrust him out from his presence; and he would not that he should have the records. Wherefore, he said unto him: **Behold thou art a robber, and I will slay thee.**"- (emphasis added, [1 Nephi 3:13](#))

By labeling the sons of Lehi as robbers, Laban could take military action against them and slay them. The accusation that they are robbers is deliberate by Laban. At the same time, Laban accelerated his demise by labeling Nephi as a robber and outsider. This could be the reason why the Lord uses the law of the land and Laban's reasoning to justify Nephi in taking Laban's life. Laban's behavior leading up to his death put him in the "robbery" camp. The Lord's statement to Nephi makes Laban an outsider by contrasting him with the "nation" of Lehi. The Lord tells Nephi, "**It is better that one man should perish than that a nation should dwindle and perish in unbelief.**" (emphasis added, [1 Nephi 4:13](#))

→ How did Joseph Smith understand ancient Israelite laws regarding thieves vs. robbers?

Land of Jerusalem

In the **Bible, Jerusalem is only portrayed as a city**. The Book of Mormon references the city and the "**land of Jerusalem.**" This supposed error made by Joseph Smith drew some criticism at the time. "**There is no such land. No part of Palestine bears the name Jerusalem**, except the city itself." (Emphasis added - Origen Bachelor, 1838)²¹² Since the 1830s, **several ancient artifacts**²¹³, including the "Amarna Letter" (discovered in 1887) and the "Dead Sea Scrolls" (found in the 1940s), have **confirmed that Jerusalem was both a city and a land**. "Behold," wrote Abdi-Heba, "the king [of Egypt] has set his name in the land of Jerusalem for ever; so he cannot abandon the **lands of Jerusalem!**"²¹⁴ (emphasis added)



Source: [Amarna Letter EA 19](#). Image via Wikipedia.

Tumbaga

A set of **pure gold** plates the size and dimension of the Book of Mormon plates would have weighed around 100 pounds.²¹⁵ Yet **witnesses who hefted the Book of Mormon plates** claim they **weighed more like 40 to 60 pounds**.²¹⁶ Tumbaga is a metal alloy used in ancient South and Central America. It usually consists of copper and gold. Geologist Jerry Grover estimates that **tumbaga plates would weigh approximately 54 to 58 pounds**.²¹⁷ Plus, a gold and copper alloy would be easier to write on than soft pure gold.



Source: [Evidence Central](#). Comparison of a tumbaga vessel with a more reddish copper color and a tumbaga bird figurine with a more golden finish. Featured left: gold and tumbaga vessel from Sicán culture, Peru, 750-1375 Pre-Columbian; Birmingham Museum of Art. Featured right: Pre-Columbian "birdman" made of tumbaga, from the Smithsonian.

Is tumbaga why some witnesses described the plates as having the “appearance of gold?”²¹⁸ Is tumbaga the reason why William Smith said they were “a mixture of gold and copper?”²¹⁹

Casting Arrows

The Book of Mormon contains a handful of references to **bows and arrows**. Nephi breaking his bow is the first example. Curiously, the Book of Mormon sometimes refers to arrows being “shot” and at other times to **arrows being “cast” or “thrown.”** In [Alma 49](#):

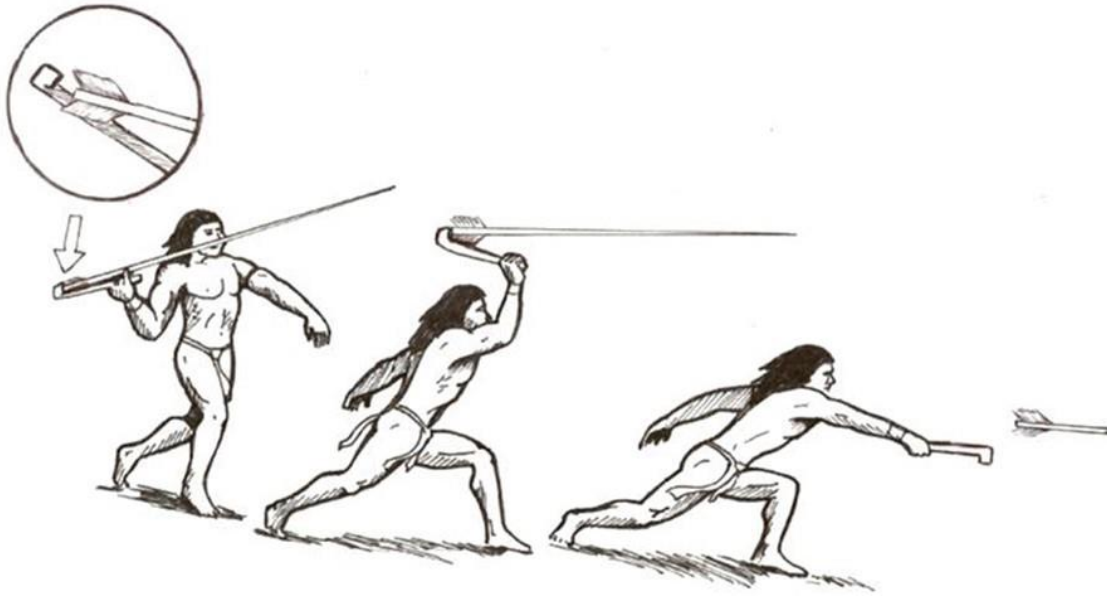
“... Nephites had dug up a ridge of earth round about them, which was so high that the Lamanites could not **cast** their stones and their arrows at them.” (verse 4, emphasis added)

“... Nephites prepared to destroy all such as should attempt to climb up to enter the fort by any other way, by **casting** over stones and arrows at them.” (verse 19, emphasis added)

“... but behold, in these attempts they were swept off by the stones and arrows which were **thrown** at them.” (verse 22, emphasis added)

→ Why would Joseph Smith mix the words “thrown” or “cast” into Book of Mormon references to the use of arrows?

Below is an artist's depiction of an ancient American weapon, the **atlatl**, used in Aztec and Mayan cultures as early as 4000 BC.²²⁰



Depiction of an atlatl in use. Image via Wikimedia Commons

Jacob Chapter 5

The longest chapter of the Book of Mormon is an allegory where the Lord of the vineyard tends to his olive tree vineyard. The chapter compares the handling and caring of the orchard to the scattering and gathering of Israel. [The description of olive tree maintenance is detailed by an experienced hand.](#)²²¹ Even the areas where the allegory splits from botanical rules are instructive.

→ When did **Joseph Smith become so acquainted with olive tree cultivation that he could make up the allegory?** Is there any evidence that he, his family, or his neighbors grew olives in upstate New York or Vermont?

Jacob 5 quotes this allegory from a non-biblical ancient prophet named Zenos. After the publication of the Book of Mormon, critics scorned Joseph Smith for this seemingly made-up story and prophet. No other author in the Bible references the olive tree allegory or the prophet Zenos. Interestingly though, **in 1887**, scholars discovered an early **Christian apocryphal writing** called the "[Apocalypse of Peter](#)."²²² Some early Christian churches considered it a part of the New Testament scripture.²²³ Below is an **excerpt from the "Apocalypse of Peter"** in which Peter asks the Lord more about the fig tree that he cursed²²⁴ (in [Mark 11:11-21](#)). **Hint: Swap out "fig tree" for "olive tree."**

"And I, Peter, answered and said unto him: Interpret unto me concerning the fig-tree, whereby we shall perceive it; for throughout all its days doth the fig-tree send forth shoots, and every year it bringeth forth its fruit for its master. What then meaneth the parable of the fig-tree? We know it not.

And the Master (Lord) answered and said unto me: Understandest thou not that **the fig-tree is the house of Israel?** Even as a man that planted a fig-tree in his garden, and it brought forth no fruit. And he sought the fruit thereof many years and when he found it not, he said to the keeper of his garden: Root up this fig-tree that it make not our ground to be unfruitful.

And the gardener said unto God: **(Suffer us) to rid it of weeds and dig the ground round about it and water it. If then it bear not fruit, we will straightway remove its roots out of the garden and plant another in place of it.** Hast thou not understood that the fig-tree is the house of Israel?" (emphasis added)

Guerilla Warfare

Daniel Peterson identifies the **authenticity of guerilla warfare in the Book of Mormon** in his 1990 book, *Warfare in the Book of Mormon*.²²⁵ Combat depicted in the Book of Mormon **differs significantly from the type of warfare familiar to Joseph Smith**. Only a couple of generations removed from the Revolutionary War, Joseph seems to romanticize the formality of warfare typical in the late 18th to early 19th-century era. Namely, two opposing armies in official uniforms. [The Book of Mormon, however, accurately depicts genuine guerrilla warfare](#). Book of Mormon warfare "operates on the principles of stealth, surprise, hidden base camps, small-scale skirmishes, strategic retreats, favorable terrain, and subversive propaganda."²²⁶

- How did Joseph Smith think of the authentic warfare tactics of the Gadianton robbers? Is there any evidence that he was familiar with different types of warfare?

Ether's Genealogy

We learn from several witnesses that Joseph Smith had no manuscript or sources while translating the Book of Mormon. Emma Smith said, "After meals, or after interruptions, [Joseph] **would at once begin where he had left off, without either seeing the manuscript or having any portion of it read to him**. This was a usual thing for him to do."²²⁷ (emphasis added)

- How did Joseph Smith remember a list of 30 Jaredite Kings/names in the Book of Ether (chapter 1) and then remember to discuss each king/name in reverse order in Ether 6-11? Isn't this feat incredible if Joseph Smith was making up the Book of Mormon off the top of his head?

The Genealogy from Jared to Ether

Order of Occurrence on the Initial King List

Ether	1:6
Coriantor	1:6
Moron	1:7
Ethem	1:8
Ahah	1:9
Seth	1:10
Shiblom	1:11
Com	1:12
Coriantum	1:13
Amnigaddah	1:14
Aaron	1:15
Heth	1:16
Hearthom	1:16
Lib	1:17
Kish	1:18
Corom	1:19
Levi	1:20
Kim	1:21
Morianton	1:22
Riplakish	1:23
Shez	1:24
Heth	1:25
Com	1:26
Coriantum	1:27
Emer	1:28
Omer	1:29
Shule	1:30
Shib	1:31
Coriantor	1:32
Jared	1:32 1:33
Coriantor	1:34

Order of First Occurrence in the Narrative History

Ether	11:23
Coriantor	11:18
Moron	11:14
Ethem	11:11
Ahah	11:10
Seth	11:9
Shiblom	11:4
Com	10:31
Coriantum	10:31
Amnigaddah	10:31
Aaron	10:31
Heth	10:31
Hearthom	10:29
Lib	10:18
Kish	10:17
Corom	10:16
Levi	10:14
Kim	10:13
Morianton	10:9
Riplakish	10:4
Shez	10:1
Heth	9:25
Com	9:25
Coriantum	9:21
Emer	9:14
Omer	8:1
Shule	7:7
Shib	7:3
Coriantor	6:14
Jared	1:32 1:33



KnoWhy #235

Infographic by Book of Mormon Central on Evidence Central

100 Different Names for Christ

The Book of Mormon contains at least **100 different names and titles for Jesus Christ**.²²⁸ How did Joseph Smith do that? Isn't the variety and how the names are woven into the text incredibly impressive for someone making up a book on the spot? Susan Black illustrated the variety in a [1978 Ensign article](#), which I've recreated below:

Name	# of instances	Name	# of instances	Name	# of instances
1. Almighty	2	35. Head	3	68. Mighty God	3
2. Almighty God	4	36. Holy Child	1	69. Mighty One of Israel	1
3. Alpha and Omega	1	37. Holy God	2	70. Mighty One of Jacob	2
4. Being	5	38. Holy Messiah	2	71. Most High	1
5. Beloved	2	39. Holy One	8	72. Most High God	5
6. Beloved Son	3	40. Holy One of Israel	40	73. Only Begotten of the Father	4
7. Christ	312	41. Holy One of Jacob	1	74. Only Begotten Son	5
8. Christ Jesus	1	42. Husband	1	75. Prince of Peace	1
9. Christ the Son	1	43. Immanuel	2	76. Prophet	6
10. Counselor	1	44. Jehovah	1	77. Redeemer	37
11. Creator	7	45. Jesus	113	78. Redeemer of Israel	1
12. Eternal Father	4	46. Jesus Christ	51	79. Redeemer of the world	2
13. Eternal God	6	47. Keeper of the gate	1	80. Rock	7
14. Eternal Head	1	48. King	4	81. Savior	8
15. Eternal Judge	1	49. King of heaven	1	82. Savior Jesus Christ	2
16. Everlasting Father	3	50. Lamb	34	83. Savior of the world	2
17. Everlasting God	2	51. Lamb of God	35	84. Shepherd	1
18. Father	31	52. Lord	1,350	85. Son	44
19. Father of heaven	1	53. Lord God	104	86. Son of God	51
20. Father of heaven and of earth	2	54. Lord God Almighty	4	87. Son of Righteousness	3
21. Founder of Peace	1	55. Lord God Omnipotent	1	88. Son of the Eternal Father	2
22. God	1,351	56. Lord God of Hosts	5	89. Son of the Everlasting God	1
23. God of Abraham	5	57. Lord Jehovah	1	90. Son of the Living God	4
24. God of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob	2	58. Lord Jesus	2	91. Son of the Most High God	1
25. God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and the God of Jacob	1	59. Lord Jesus Christ	14	92. Stone	2
26. God of Isaac	5	60. Lord of Hosts	52	93. Supreme Being	1
27. God of Israel	11	61. Lord of the Vineyard	33	94. Supreme Creator	1
28. God of Jacob	6	62. Lord Omnipotent	5	95. True and Living God	1
29. God of miracles	1	63. Maker	5	96. True Messiah	2
30. God of nature	1	64. Man	1	97. True Shepherd	1
31. God of the whole earth	2	65. Master	7	98. True Vine	1
32. Good shepherd	8	66. Mediator	1	99. Well Beloved	3
33. Great Creator	2	67. Messiah	28	100. Wonderful	1

Source: Black, Susan. "Names of Christ in the Book of Mormon," *Ensign*, Vol. 8. No. 7 1978:60-61

A Book About Actual Events

One of the most compelling aspects of the Book of Mormon is that it reads like **a book about things that happened in real life**—not a story in the mind of inexperienced 23-year-old Joseph Smith.

→ In the journey to the promised land, the daughters of Ishmael waver after their father, Ishmael, dies (1 Nephi 16:35). Sariah wavers when she thinks her sons are dead (1 Nephi 5:1). Lehi falters when he, the patriarch of the family, is unable to provide for them (1 Nephi 16:20). Don't these examples and many others ring true to how family dynamics and faith work in real life?

Isn't it interesting that when Nephi's steel bow breaks, he does not use his old arrows with his wood bow? He makes an arrow from the same wood as his new bow (1 Nephi 16:23). Anyone unfamiliar with archery would not [include that tidbit](#).²²⁹ However, including that subtle detail hints that this is a recorded event. Nephi's arrows from his steel bow would not have been suitable for his wood bow.

Conclusion of "How Did Joseph Smith Know?"

In my opinion, no one item listed above (and many more unlisted) proves Joseph Smith's claims of divine intervention. However, Joseph's ministry becomes more **unbelievable in a natural sense** when triangulating the affirmative signs. I've grown surprised at how the critical community widely ignores items like Enochic literature, Jaredite kings, the land of Jerusalem, and sacrifices allowed three days out from the temple. I kept getting the nagging feeling they were **looking for ways to doubt** instead of looking at the whole picture.

There are plenty of reasons to question the restoration's truth claims. That said, it is also true that simply writing off the faith-promoting elements is not becoming of a light and truth seeker.

Fruits of the Church

Questions & Concerns

“Any good in the Mormonism is available outside of Mormonism (without the toxic, cult mindset that Mormonism requires).” – X (Twitter) user.

Even when my belief in God was at an all-time low, I could not deny how much good had come to my life through my membership in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. It seemed obvious that the Church was good for people. However, **the more I listened to the critics of the church**, the more I started to reflect. Does it just work for me? Does it cause harm to people? Was I unknowingly damaged?

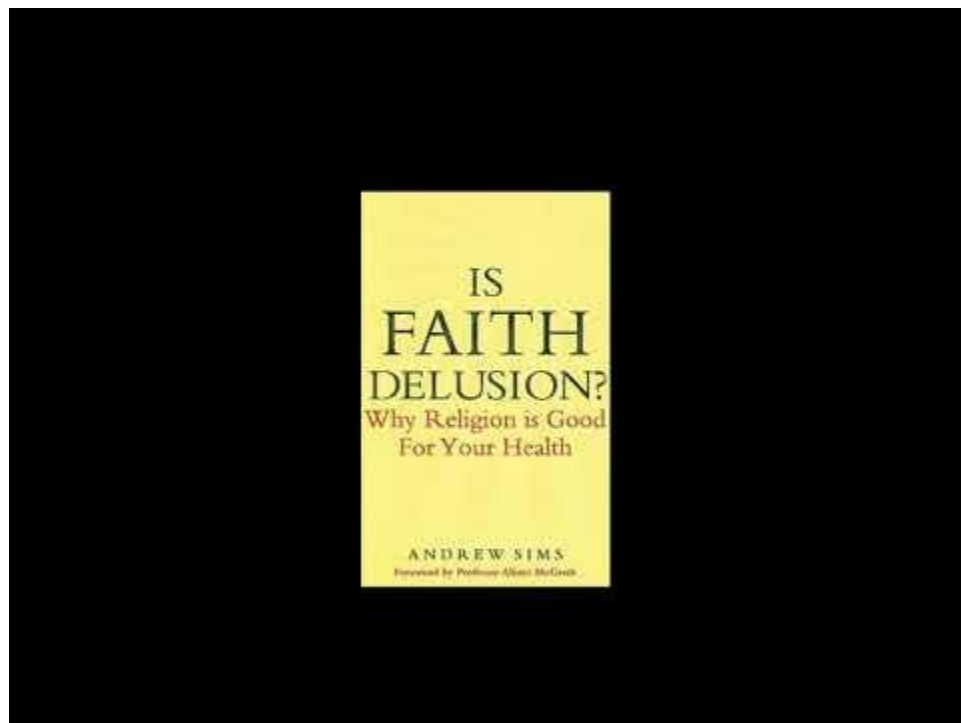
The critics wanted me to believe that the Church of Jesus Christ was **not true** and also **not good**. I wondered if my positive experience in the Church was an anomaly. Maybe, in reality, the Church is bad for individuals, families, communities, and the world. Are critics shedding light on a problem I was unaware of? Is the Church a drain on society? Do members suffer because of it?

Health

“God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him.” – FREDERICK NIETZSCHE (1882)²³⁰

The West is **less religious and more secular** than ever. Atheists undoubtedly celebrate the world's ever-decreasing religiosity. When I dabbled with agnosticism, I had to consider the **fruits of secularism** seriously. Would I be better off the less religious I become? Has society at large benefitted from the loss of belief?

(For more information on this topic, I highly recommend Daniel Peterson's 2017 FAIR conference speech, “What Difference Does It Make?” Watch it below. The transcript is available from the FAIR Latter-day Saint website at [“What Difference Does It Make?”](#))



“Faith seems to me to qualify as a kind of mental illness.” – RICHARD DAWKINS (“The Selfish Gene,” 1976)

“It is difficult to imagine a set of beliefs more suggestive of mental illness than those that lie at the heart of many of our religious traditions.” – SAM HARRIS (“The End of Faith,” 2004)

Are religious people, by definition, “sick”? Mentally ill? Is atheism healthier than faith?

Our country is in the midst of a mental health crisis.²³¹ [From the National Alliance on Mental Illness:](#)²³²

- 1 in 5 U.S. adults experience mental illness each year
- 1 in 20 U.S. adults experience serious mental illness each year
- 1 in 6 U.S. youth aged 6-17 experience a mental health disorder each year
- 50% of all lifetime mental illness begins by age 14, and 75% begins by age 24
- Suicide is the 2nd leading cause of death among people aged 10-14

"The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) monitors mental health and substance abuse through the Youth Mental Health Survey, a poll of high school students collected as questionnaires every two years since 2011. The most recent data from 2021 was stunning: 42% 'experienced persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness,' up from 28% in 2011. And 22% 'seriously considered attempting suicide,' up from 16% in 2011. While the 2021 data might reflect some of the most difficult months of the pandemic, the trends were apparent before 2021.' **Historically, youth have had low rates of suicide mortality, but that began changing about a decade ago.** Today, **youth and young adults (ages 10-24) account for 15% of all suicides, an increase of 52.2% since 2000.**"²³³

"The CDC reported 105,452 drug overdose deaths for 2022, more than a fivefold increase from 2002 and double the number from 2015. The highest death rates are in males ages 35-44."²³⁴

Government officials, news outlets, academics, researchers, psychologists, psychiatrists, parents, and teachers are **desperately seeking the cause of the rise in mental health-related problems and the solution to them.**

Religiosity correlates with improved mental and physical health

→ If religion makes people sick and mentally ill, then how do critics explain the following?

²³⁵Harold Koenig (a psychiatrist on the faculty of Duke University) and his collaborators argue that **religious involvement is correlated with better mental health** in the areas of depression and substance abuse.

²³⁶Tyler VanderWeele, professor of epidemiology at Harvard University, [identified a link between attendance at religious services and enhanced health](#). Regular attendance was associated, for example, with a "roughly **30 percent reduction in mortality** over 16 years of follow-up; a **five-fold reduction in the likelihood of suicide**; and a **30 percent reduction in the incidence of depression**" (emphasis added), VanderWeele writes.

- Regular participation in communal religious worship appears to be associated with a "greater likelihood of **healthy social relationships and stable marriages**; an increased sense of **meaning in life**; **higher life satisfaction**; an expansion of one's social network; and **more charitable giving, volunteering, and civic engagement**," (emphasis added), says VanderWeele.

²³⁷Dr. Andrew Sims is the former president of the United Kingdom's Royal College of Psychiatrists and professor of psychiatry at the University of Leeds. In his book *Is Faith Delusion?* he contends that "churches are almost the only element in society to have offered **considerate, caring, long-lasting and self-sacrificing support to the mentally ill,**" which is one of the reasons why **"religious involvement results in a better outcome from a range of illnesses, both mental and physical."** (emphasis added)

Sims summarizes that in the majority of scientific studies, **religious involvement correlates** with at least the following nineteen outcomes:

✓ Enhanced Well Being	✓ Faster recovery from depression
✓ Happiness	✓ Reduced rates of suicide
✓ Life Satisfaction	✓ Decreased anxiety
✓ Greater Hope and Optimism	✓ Better coping with stress
✓ Sense of Purpose & Meaning	✓ Less psychosis
✓ Higher Self-Esteem	✓ Lower rates of alcohol and drug abuse
✓ Better response to bereavement	✓ Less delinquency and criminal activity
✓ Great Social Support	✓ Greater marital stability and satisfaction
✓ Less Loneliness	✓ Fortified immune system
✓ Lower Rates of Depression	

Dr. Sims continues, "An inverse relationship has been found between religious involvement and suicidal behaviour in 84 per cent of 68 studies. That is, **those with religious belief and practice are less likely to kill themselves.** This association is also found for attempted suicide; **believers are less likely to overdose** or use other methods of self-harm." (emphasis added)

²³⁸In his 2004 book *Who Really Cares*, Dr. Arthur Brooks notes that scores of studies demonstrate that religious **believers live longer and healthier lives.** People who **never attend religious services are at the highest risk of early death,** while those who attend more than once each week have the lowest risk. **Religious people heal more quickly from severe diseases and surgeries.**

- Dr. Brooks concludes that **religious people are happier and more satisfied than the irreligious.** They cope better with crisis. They recover faster from divorce, bereavement, and being fired. They enjoy higher rates of marital stability and marital satisfaction. They are less likely to be depressed, to become alcoholics or drug addicts, to commit suicide, or to commit crimes. Elderly religious people are much less likely to be depressed, but even if they are depressed, they are less so than their unbelieving counterparts.

²³⁹The Heritage Foundation conducted a large-scale study in the mid-nineties and summarized their results in the report "Why Religion Matters: The Impact of Religious Practice on Social Stability." Among their findings, they **discovered the following fifteen benefits of religious practice:**

✓	Marital happiness and stability
✓	Stronger parent-child relationships
✓	Greater education
✓	Higher levels of good work habits
✓	Greater longevity
✓	Better physical health
✓	Higher levels of well-being and happiness
✓	Higher recovery rates from addiction to alcohol and drugs
✓	Higher levels of self-control
✓	Higher levels of self-esteem
✓	Better coping skills
✓	More charitable giving
✓	More volunteering
✓	Higher levels of community cohesion
✓	More social support for those in need

The Heritage Foundation concluded, “**No other dimension of life in America** — with the exception of stable marriages and families, which in turn are strongly tied to religious practice — **does more to promote the wellbeing and soundness of the nation’s civil society than citizens’ religious observance.**” (emphasis added)

- What about religious participation contributes so much to mental and emotional health?
- Do the atheists have a better program than religion to promote well-being?

²⁴⁰In *America’s Blessings: How Religion Benefits Everyone, Including Atheists*, Rodney Stark suggests that the evidence “shows overwhelmingly that **religion protects against mental illness.**” (emphasis added) For example, persons with strong, conservative religious beliefs are less depressed than those with weak and loose religious beliefs. “**They are happier, less neurotic, and far less likely to commit suicide.**” (emphasis added)

Rodney Stark finds at least the following nine **benefits that religious people enjoy over their irreligious counterparts:**

✓	Greater satisfaction with marriage and spouse
✓	Less likely to have extramarital affairs
✓	Men are significantly less likely to abuse wife or children
✓	Mother-child relationships are stronger

- ✓ **Greater teenager satisfaction** with their families
- ✓ Reduced risk of heart disease
- ✓ Reduced risk of high blood pressure
- ✓ Reduced risk of hypertension
- ✓ **Increased life expectancy by seven years**

→ Why are **religious people materially better off** than the **irreligious**?

Are the health benefits of being religious tied only to the social support common in membership in a church community?

²⁴¹VanderWeele says that **social support accounts for only about 20-30 percent of his measured results**. Self-discipline and an optimistic worldview fostered by religious faith appear to contribute more to physical health and longevity.

²⁴²Dr. Andrew Sims writes, "When looking at the overall effects of religious belief and practice on whole populations, there is substantial evidence **that religion is highly beneficial for all areas of health, and especially mental health**." (emphasis added) Indeed, correlations between religious faith and improved well-being "typically **equal or exceed correlations between well-being** and other psychosocial variables, such as **social support**." (emphasis added) He adds, that this substantial assertion is "comprehensively attested to by a large amount of evidence."

Religion professor at the Catholic University of America, Stephen Cranney, [sums up the body of religious and mental health research when he said](#)²⁴³:

"The relationship between **happiness and religiosity is so established** that many research papers take it as a **given starting point**." (emphasis added)

"**The happiness-faith relationship is strong enough** that it shows up **almost any way you slice the data** or ask the question." (emphasis added)

"**Religiosity** has also been found to be associated with other **positive emotions** that are precursors to happiness such as **optimism, hope, gratitude, and self-esteem**." (emphasis added)

→ Is it too much to say that **we could all use a little more Jesus**?

→ Doesn't all this suggest that religious observance significantly contributes to **human wellness and flourishing**?

→ **How do critics suggest that I offset the loss of the overwhelmingly positive benefits** of church and religious observance to myself and my family when they suggest I **leave** the Church of Jesus Christ?

→ **Do the critics have a better program than the Church to support well-being?** Where is it? How do I join? Does it work?

I suppose it is up to each person to define what “good fruits” and “bad fruits” look like. From my perspective, more depression, less reported happiness, less marital happiness, shorter and less healthy lives, less gratitude, and so many more seemingly negative consequences are bad. Yet, these appear to be the **consequences of unbelief**.

- A big category like “happiness” has complicated inputs and outputs. With that said, to assume that declining religiosity has no effect or a positive effect on “happiness” seems farfetched to me. **If the world is less religious than ever, why does it seem that people are worse, not better off?**

Benefits to Society

“Austin, I was tired of talking about helping people and wanted to actually do it.” – Private conversation with a dear friend and mentor who left the Church.

Some critics argue that church members are good at caring for their own but blind to the issues outside their church walls.

So, do Latter-day Saints and other religious organizations only care for themselves? Are their examples of charity and self-sacrifice only beneficial to their tribe?

Arthur Brooks²⁴⁴ has studied **patterns in charitable giving and service** for many years and is widely recognized as perhaps the pre-eminent authority on the subject. In his 2006 volume, *Who Really Cares*, he summarizes several insightful findings made when **comparing religious churchgoers to their non-religious non-churchgoer counterparts**. Among these findings include these ten:

- ✓ Religious people **give more to charity** than non-religious people
- ✓ Religious people **donate more money** - and not merely to their religious organization
- ✓ Religious people are more likely to **give money to friends and family**
- ✓ Religious people are far more likely to give **food or money to the homeless**
- ✓ Religious people are more likely to **donate blood**
- ✓ Religious people are more likely to **return money they get from a cashier's mistake**
- ✓ Religious people are more likely to express empathy for the less fortunate
- ✓ European churchgoers are **15% more likely to volunteer** for nonreligious charities
- ✓ **If a non-churchgoer was raised in a religious home**, they are **more likely to donate to charity than non-churchgoers who were not**
- ✓ In the US and Europe, **churchgoers are more likely to give to charitable causes** than their secular counterparts.

After surveying the relevant data, Rodney Stark draws several striking conclusions in *America's Blessings: How Religion Benefits Everyone, Including Atheists*.²⁴⁵ Among those conclusions are:

- Regardless of age, Stark says, **religious people are much less likely to commit crimes**. Accordingly, the higher a city's church membership rate, the lower its rates of burglary, larceny, robbery, assault, rape, sexually transmitted disease, and homicide.
- In a cleverly designed test at Pepperdine University, **weekly church attenders were more than three times as honest as non-attenders**.
- Nearly 250 studies conducted between 1944 and 2010 showed clear evidence that **religion helps to reduce delinquency, deviation, and crime**. Stark states, "**All Americans are safer and their property more secure because this is such a religious nation.**" (emphasis added)
- **Religious people are the primary source of charitable funds** for religious causes and secular philanthropies that benefit all victims of distress and misfortune. They are **far more likely to volunteer for programs** that benefit society and to be active in civic matters.
- **Religious students tend to get better grades** than their non-religious counterparts and **score higher on all standardized achievement tests**. They are less likely to be expelled or suspended or to drop out of school and more likely to do their homework.
- Religious Americans are also, on average, **more successful in their careers than are the irreligious**. They obtain better jobs and are less likely to experience unemployment or be on welfare.
- Churchgoers are more likely to read, patronize the arts, and enjoy classical music than non-churchgoers.

Dr. Robert Putnam, in his book *Bowling Alone*²⁴⁶ concludes that churchgoers, compared to others, are much more likely to do or participate in the following:

✓ Visit friends	✓ Service clubs
✓ Entertain at home	✓ Hobby or garden clubs
✓ Attend club meetings	✓ Literary, art, discussion, and study groups
✓ Sports groups	✓ School fraternities and sororities
✓ Professional and academic societies	✓ Farm organizations
✓ School service groups	✓ Political clubs
✓ Youth groups	✓ Nationality groups

- How do critics suggest offsetting the loss of the overwhelmingly positive benefits of church and religious observance to society when they try to convince me to no longer be religious?
- **Do the critics have a better program than the Church for benefitting society?** Where is it? How do I join? **What evidence do they have that it works?**

Members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints²⁴⁷

Regarding the previous sections, is it fair to lump Latter-day Saints in the broad category of “religion?” Do the Latter-day Saints rank higher, lower, or average compared to other religious and non-religious groups?

Latter-day Saints are highly religious

In the 2014 Religious Landscape Survey by Pew Research,²⁴⁸ **Latter-day Saints rank higher in religiosity than any other group.** Specifically, Pew Research shows that Latter-day Saints rank at or near the top in every religiosity category listed including these four:

Rate their frequency of feeling spiritual peace and well-being as “At least once a week”

Rate their belief in God as “Absolutely certain” or “Fairly certain”

Frequency of prayer rated as “Daily prayer”

Rate their frequency of reading scripture as “At least once a week”

Pew Research concludes that **nearly seven in ten (69%) Latter-day Saints exhibit strong religious commitment—more than any other religious group surveyed** and substantially more than the U.S. public generally (30%).

Brent Top, Bruce Chadwick, and Richard McClendon report in their book *Shield of Faith* that **Latter-day Saint youth and young adults rank highly religious in virtually every category of “religiosity.”**²⁴⁹

Latter-day Saints live longer lives

Christopher Layton **compared four groups in Utah:** a). total Utah, b). active LDS (members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints), c). less-active LDS, and d). non-LDS. **Active LDS males live eight years longer** than their less active and non-LDS counterparts, and **active LDS females live six years longer** than less active and non-LDS females.²⁵⁰

2000 Utah Males	Life expectancy at birth	2000 Utah Females	Life expectancy at birth
LDS	79.8	LDS	83.9
Less active LDS	71.6	Less active LDS	77.7
Non-LDS	71.5	Non-LDS	77.4

Ray Merrill published similar findings in 2004 regarding LDS and non-LDS people in Utah.²⁵¹ LDS males lived 7.3 years longer than their non-LDS counterparts, and LDS females lived 5.8 years longer. Interestingly, **reduced tobacco usage among LDS only accounted for a 1.5-year difference for males and a 1.2-year difference for females.** Therefore, other factors likely account for the remaining difference in life expectancy.

In a 25-year study of the health habits and longevity of active Californian Latter-day Saints (referred to in the study as “Mormon lifestyle”), non-Latter-day Saint UCLA professors James E. Enstrom and Lester Breslow conclude: “Several healthy characteristics of the Mormon lifestyle are associated with **substantially reduced death rates and increased life expectancy.**” (emphasis added)²⁵² Additionally, they conclude that **the more active a member is in the Church of Jesus Christ, the longer they live.**

- With the media coverage that health fads receive, why aren’t we talking about the health benefits of being a member of the Church? Why are less active and non-Latter-day Saint Utahns living shorter lives than members of the Church?

Members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints living longer seems to be common knowledge, and the only type of rebuttal I have seen from critics goes something like this:

“I don’t know if how Mormons live, really means living. Life expectancy may be longer, but we sure ... have fewer life experiences.” – Reddit user in response to the question “Do Mormons really live longer?”²⁵³

“I think it just FEELS longer if you are Mormon.” – Reddit user in response to the question “Do Mormons really live longer?”

- What do these critics think I am missing out on by being a devote member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints?

Latter-day Saint teenagers and young adults are better off by nearly every meaningful measure²⁵⁴

Some former members of the Church of Jesus Christ have commented that their parents and the Church were too strict. Are the high standards of a typical Latter-day Saint home damaging our youth? As a faithful member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, am I setting up my children to fail in the future?

Psychologist Diana Baumbrind developed a highly regarded theory for parenting styles in the late 1970’s.²⁵⁵ Of the four parenting styles, she found that **children raised in authoritative homes were most likely to be socially confident, friendly, self-disciplined, cooperative, and achievement-oriented.**²⁵⁶ (emphasis added) Parents with an authoritative style are nurturing and supportive, but firm limits are set for their children.²⁵⁷ Boundaries and rules are well-defined.

- In a 2006 manual titled “Strengthen the Family” for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, session one is dedicated to encouraging authoritative parenting.²⁵⁸ It states:

“The parenting principles taught in this course most closely resemble those of authoritative parenting. This approach is most consistent with the scriptures and teachings from Church leaders.”

“According to this standard, **parents teach and guide their children by persuasion, patience, and love** (see D&C 121:41–44). They are willing to discuss their decisions with their children and explain their reasons for those decisions. They are also willing to reprove their children when guided by the Spirit and give them the guidance they need.” (emphasis added)

²⁵⁹In a study conducted at the University of North Carolina, Christian Smith and Melina Denton reported their findings on American teenagers in 2002 and 2003. This sizeable study was conducted across 45 states with 3,400 teens. They published their findings in their book *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers*. In short, **Latter-day Saint teens ranked highly or at the top of effectively every measure of religiosity** in their study.

"I'm not saying they're all perfect," says the study's lead author, UNC sociology professor Christian Smith. "I'm not trying to idealize Mormon kids," but when belief and social outcomes are measured, he says, **"Mormon kids tend to be on top."** (emphasis added)

In the study and subsequent book *Shield of Faith*, Brent Top, Bruce Chadwick, and Richard McClendon summarize their results from a 17-year study across three countries.²⁶⁰ It was one of the largest samples ever collected on Latter-day Saints, with several thousand Latter-day Saint teens and young adults participating in the study. Data was collected from Latter-day Saint youth and young adults from all over the country, including the East Coast, Washington, Oregon, Utah County, and Castle Dale, Utah. Additionally, they collected data from Great Britain and Mexico.

Here are some key findings from their study:

- "This study shows **that LDS youth with a high level of religiosity are not only less likely to participate in harmful delinquent activities but also more likely to have healthy self-esteem, resist peer pressure, and excel in school.**" (emphasis added)
- "The results also indicate that religiosity is a strong predictor of **academic achievement, high levels of self-esteem, and low rates of depression.**"
- **Latter-day Saints have significantly more education than the general public.** For LDS youth, **more religiosity is correlated with more academic success.** Interestingly, **LDS adults who have more advanced education are more likely to be more religious**, which is counter to the trend in other religious circles.²⁶¹
- **Latter-day Saint returned missionaries have a much lower rate of divorce** and more children than their peers in the United States. **The socioeconomic status of LDS return missionaries is greater than the national average.**²⁶²
- **Latter-day Saint men and women with higher rates of religiosity experience significantly lower levels of depression** than the average American. **The religious LDS lifestyle acts as a buffer against depression.** Higher amounts of private religious behavior, such as private prayer, as well as public behavior, like church attendance, are negatively correlated with depression. Meaning the more religious you are in the Latter-day Saint faith, the odds are that you will be less depressed.²⁶³

- What organization or group would I rather raise my children in?
- If my priority as a parent is better mental and physical health for my children, isn't more active membership in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints a viable choice?
- If I had understood all this 20+ years ago as a youth, wouldn't I likely have wanted to choose to put myself in the best possible position for better emotional and physical health?
- Do the critics have a program that better promotes youth and young adults' health and well-being than the Church? Where is it? How do I join? Does it work?
- Do the critics have more light and truth to offer?

Latter-day Saint marriages are more stable

Multiple studies and survey datasets ranging from 1985 to 2024 **consistently show that Latter-day Saints have the lowest (or among the lowest) divorce rates** compared to both religious and non-religious groups.²⁶⁴

- Rate of divorce in a 1985 study - 14.3% (LDS men) and 18.8% (LDS women) compared to 19.8% (Catholic men, next lowest average) and 44.7% (non-religious women, highest average). They also report a **6% divorce rate for temple marriages**.²⁶⁵
- In a 1993 study, **LDS marriages had the lowest probability (13%) of marriage dissolution** of any other religious denomination, with “no religious affiliation” having the highest probability (36%).²⁶⁶
- As reported in 2010 in the *Shield of Faith*, **returned missionary men had a 9% divorce rate, and returned missionary women had a 15% divorce rate. The US men's average was 38%, and the US women's average was 48%**.²⁶⁷
- In a 2023 survey of 2,625 current members and 1,183 former members of the Church – **The divorce rate for temple marriages was three times lower** than the national average. Further, **former Latter-day Saints are twice as likely to experience divorce than active Latter-day Saints**.²⁶⁸

In the previously referenced [Pew Research 2014 Religious Landscape Survey](#)²⁶⁹, they found:

- **66% of Latter-day Saints are married.** By far, this is **the highest of any group surveyed**.
- **Latter-day Saints average 3.4 children vs. 2.2 for the average Christian.**
- 64% of those raised in a Latter-day Saint household still identify as Latter-day Saints as adults, better than all other Christian denominations. Reported in the study was that “Among the 350 families ..., **no religious group was more effective in passing on their religious identity and beliefs to their children than Mormons.**” (emphasis added)
- Frequency of feeling spiritual peace and well-being among members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints being “at least once a week” (the highest report). – LDS Men 80%, LDS Women 83%.

→ Lower divorce rates are better for couples, children, families, and society, right? Wouldn't the Church's track record in this regard be a massive boon to the US and the world as divorce rates and the number of single-parent households skyrocket?

→ Wouldn't children generally be better off being raised by their father and mother?

→ I have to ask myself, why do higher marriage rates, more children, and lower divorce seem to be linked to membership in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints? What is the Church doing right?

Critics are great at pointing out the one-off examples where divorce was the best solution. That's great. However, what about the cases (perhaps many cases) where divorce could be avoided? Isn't a program or a church with a solid track record of lower divorce rates worth exploring?

→ **What do critics propose? Do they have a program that creates better environments for children and families?** What is that program? How does it work? Does it work? How do I join? What do they teach?

→ Do critics have something to offer me that will provide more light and truth in my life? In my family's life?

Latter-day Saints are happier²⁷⁰

I am cautious about conflating "Utah" with "Members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints," but the connection does bear some merit. [Utah consistently nears the top of the Gallup Happiness poll they publish yearly.](#)²⁷¹

In 2013, the *Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index* found that [Provo-Orem, Utah, was the happiest city in the U.S.](#)²⁷² Around the same time, **Provo-Orem was 90% Latter-day Saint** and was ranked as the most highly religious metropolitan area in the US with [77% of its resident reportedly very religious.](#)²⁷³ This simple correlation does not prove that religion is the source of all happiness, but it certainly throws into question the inverse correlation insinuated by some critics.

In 2012, the Pew Research Center's Forum on Religious Life released a broad study titled "Mormons in America."²⁷⁴ In that study, they found:

- **"The overwhelming majority** [of members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints] **are satisfied in their own lives** and content with their communities." (emphasis added)
- Nearly nine out of ten reported **being satisfied with their lives and content with their communities**²⁷⁵, higher than the U.S. public (75%).²⁷⁶ (emphasis added)
- Pew says this percentage is even more significant among younger Latter-day Saints: **"Fully 92% of Mormons under age 50 are satisfied with their lives."** (emphasis added)
- Within the LDS community, those with **the highest levels of religious commitment are more satisfied than those with lower levels of religious commitment** (91% compared to 78%).

→ **Who wouldn't want to be happier?** More fulfilled? Have more peace? Have more purpose? If the solution wasn't "become a Latter-day Saint," wouldn't every government organization and news outlet push for more membership in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints? How do critics account for the **prodigiously positive health and well-being outcomes** for members of the Church of Jesus Christ?

A reader on Ex-Mormon message boards would have no idea that Latter-day Saints are statistically happier than other religious groups and especially happier than the non-religious group.

"So Mormons are 'happier' says research. Yeah right. The reasons are interesting, and I think characteristic of why so many others are NOT happy, but certainly not unique to Mormonism..." – Post on exmormon.org forum in response to a study outlining why Latter-day Saints are happier.²⁷⁷

"I used to work in an insane asylum. There were a lot of happy people there, too." – Response to above thread on exmormon.org

“Drunks self-report as ‘happier’ than sober people, too. Doesn’t mean we should all go around drunk all the time.” – Response to above thread on exmormon.org

“Mormons always report that Mormons are happier, and often it's their church leaders telling them to log into surveys and say it's so.” - Response to above thread on exmormon.org

- My response to comments like these is, **where is the evidence?** Where is the proof that Latter-day Saints are **secretly unhappy** when they are happier by every meaningful measure? Where is the evidence that **church members are unhappy despite decades of data from sources inside and outside the Church to the contrary?**

I get the impression that critics sidestep data by sharing anecdotal examples of why the Church didn't work for them personally. You know, that's okay. We are all on our own journey, and I'm fine with some folks feeling uncomfortable with their church membership. What is not okay is when **critics attempt to use their personal experiences to suggest remedies to problems that do not exist.** That way of problem-solving **hurts far more people than it helps.**

Conclusion: Latter-day Saints have better mental outcomes and reduced risk of mental illness

In a 2010 study, Merrill and Salazar concluded that **“Active Mormons reported having the best health status and, consequently, the lowest levels of mental illness.”**²⁷⁸

In 2023, Dyer, Judd, Gale, and Finlinson summarized the body of peer-reviewed scholarly articles on the mental health of members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints from 2005 to 2022. In all, forty-six studies were reviewed. They concluded, **“When comparisons are made, Latter-day Saints are typically found to have better mental health than those of other religions or no religion.”**²⁷⁹ (emphasis added)

- **What do critics suggest for offsetting the potential negative repercussions to mental health when they convince people to resign their membership?**
- **What do the critics say** when they undermine the faith of good people and **leave them in a much worse mental and physical state?** Couldn't it be said that it is **irresponsible** for critics to convince people to leave the Church?
- **Do critics offer free-of-charge counseling** to people they have **harmed? How much counseling is required** to offset the positive benefits left behind in church membership?

None of the above findings surprise me or anyone with common sense. Growing up as a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the phrases **“choose the right,” “keep the commandments,”** and **“I am a child of God”** were instilled **deep in my soul.** I was consistently encouraged to serve others and to love God. The invitation to **lean on the Savior's atoning power to forgive myself and others** and to **receive forgiveness** was consistently taught. Church leaders told me it was my duty to serve a mission, so I did. I was invited to live the law of chastity, not have premarital sex, and then marry in the

temple. I was encouraged to have children, get an education, and **live a life of devoted service to God and my fellow man.**

Growing up, the Latter-day Saint kids were generally **well-behaved** and **studious** in class. In every place I've lived, the Latter-day Saints seemed to have, on average, **well-adjusted** and **confident** kids. Latter-day Saint adults and families, by and large, seemed **stable and happy**. Leaders in my wards **truly cared** and gave freely of their time and talents to others. I'm painfully aware that not everything is as it seems from the outside looking in. However, it is also clearly not true that the Latter-day Saints are despondent, miserable people. Though critics would have me believe otherwise, the data supports my experience with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. After learning the facts, I realized **I was not crazy** - The Church is a **good place**, and members are better off for their affiliation.

- Regardless of critics' qualms about the Church of Jesus Christ, **isn't it safe to admit that the Church's "program" works?** Do the critics have a program whereby I can find more light and truth?
- Shouldn't the critics agree that **the Church helps people live fulfilled, abundant lives?** Shouldn't the critics agree that **our children are much better off when they immerse themselves in the Church?** Don't the fruits of the Church of Jesus Christ demonstrate that the Church's practices and teachings are working?
- Although the occasional person can have a bad experience as a member of the Church of Jesus Christ, can't the critics admit that membership in the Church is much more likely to **be a net positive for any particular person?**
- If not membership in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, **what better alternative do the critics suggest?** Is there another group, philosophy, doctrine, or teaching that produces proven results like the Church?

Is there another large group whose members live the teachings of Jesus Christ more often than the Latter-day Saints?

"I'd be curious to see research about why so [many] Mormons are Unhappy. or closeted in unhappiness. Has anybody ever seen research about this?"²⁸⁰ (emphasis added) – Post on Ex-Mormon Reddit

If the Reddit user mentioned above is reading this - **I hate to inform you, but that research has not come out yet and very likely never will.**

Social Connection

In high school, I complained to a church leader that the young men in my Priest's quorum were immature and asked if I could move up into the adult Elder's Quorum early. I have never forgotten his gentle response. "You know, Austin, the day will come that you stop wondering what you will get out of church and start asking how you can contribute."

Dr. Vivek Murthy, the 19th and 21st Surgeon General of the United States (from 2014-2017 and 2021-Present in 2024), has dedicated his life and work to combating loneliness and its significant adverse health consequences.

"Social connection stands out as a largely unrecognized and underappreciated force for addressing many of the critical problems we're dealing with, both as individuals and as a society. Overcoming loneliness and building a more connected future is an urgent mission that we can and must tackle together."²⁸¹ (emphasis added)

"People with strong social relationships are 50 percent less likely to die prematurely than people with weak social relationships... **weak social connections can be a significant danger to our health.**"²⁸² (emphasis added)

"Today it's widely understood that **one of the most important factors in preventing and addressing toxic stress in children is healthy social connection.**"²⁸³ (emphasis added)

In short, **"loneliness is a public health crisis."**²⁸⁴

One of the world's longest studies of adult life, the Harvard Study of Adult Development, **identifies close relationships as the variable that keeps people happy throughout their lives.**²⁸⁵ A strong correlation exists between **better physical and mental well-being and relationships with family, friends, and community.**

Stable relationships are crucial for children's development.²⁸⁶ Those relationships come in the form of **immediate family, extended family, and social communities like churches**—all of which suffer today. All of these relationships the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints promotes, supports, and helps. Family and church communities see a child grow and provide support through the good and the bad.

There are better reasons to be a devoted member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints than social connections. With that said:

- Doesn't having a local community of local church members help create a place where folks can come together? Doesn't having a calling in the Church allow everyone to **contribute to the same cause** and **build a sense of cohesion**? Doesn't serving fellow ward members give someone a **sense of responsibility and belonging**? Aren't all of these good things for us?
- **What alternate proposal do the critics offer?** Do they have a group or **program that does more good**? Do they have a community of belonging? Does their community serve their neighbors and communities? Would their alternate proposal provide me and my family more light and truth?

In a 2021 study by the Survey Center on American Life,²⁸⁷ **Latter-day Saints reported feeling more connected to neighbors and communities than any other religious group in America.** 72% of Latter-day Saints reported feeling at least somewhat closely connected to people in their communities. The next closest group was white Catholics at 62%, and **the lowest on the list were the religiously unaffiliated at 41%.**

Additionally, **Latter-day Saints volunteer far more than the average American** and are more likely to be involved in civic and community-building leadership roles.²⁸⁸

- Why do Latter-day Saints feel more connected to their neighbors and communities than any other religious group in America? Is it our doctrine? Adherence to the teachings of Jesus Christ? The program of the Church? A combination of these?

The 2021 study by the Survey Center on American Life shows **that Latter-day Saints spend more time with people from church outside of formal services** than other groups observed.²⁸⁹

- What does the Church do to keep us so well connected with our friends and neighbors, even outside of formal church services?

- **Do critics of the Church visit members in their community with the same frequency?** Do they volunteer more than members of the Church? Do they feel as **connected to their communities** as the Latter-day Saints?

Aren't **Latter-day Saints** recognized worldwide as **good neighbors** and community members? What reputation do critics of the Church have? Does my family and community benefit more from my association with the Church, or will they benefit more if I leave it?

It has been 20 years since my priest quorum advisor gently reminded me to think of others and be less selfish. Though I have come a long way, what I did not appreciate at the time is how much showing up to church ready to contribute would be a blessing to my life. Having a family and building a community are the hardest things I have ever had to do. Likely, my day-to-day is much more challenging than it would have been had I stayed single, with my free time spent playing video games, traveling, and watching movies. Maybe I could have gotten pretty good at golf instead of shanking it every time. **My day-to-day would no doubt be easier, but the responsibilities I have accepted keep me going when life gets hard.** My kids, my wife, and my callings in Church give me an intense amount of purpose and joy that I do not get on the golf course. I still have plenty of hobbies, and I count on those. Nevertheless, at the end of my life, **I highly doubt that I will wish I had had less of an impact on my family and community to pursue less meaningful endeavors.**

Volunteerism

Latter-day Saints volunteer far more than the average American. Helping others helps the volunteer and the person being served. We feel good when we serve others. In 2012, the University of Pennsylvania's School of Social Policy and Practices analyzed survey data for 2,664 church-attending Latter-day Saints throughout the country.^{290, 291} **They found:**

Total Annual Volunteer Hours	
Latter-day Saints	427.9
Average American	48

While many of the above-reported Latter-day Saint volunteer hours are in church-related activities, many of them are not as reported below:

Type of Latter-day Service	Annual Volunteer Hours
Service in Church related activities	242
Community and Social Initiatives, worldwide welfare, and humanitarian aid programs	151.9
Social causes unrelated to the Church	34

Additionally, 88.8% of the participants surveyed paid a 10% tithing. They also donated an average of **\$1,821 to other social and community causes outside of tithing.**

The researchers commented that **"Overall, we found that [the Latter-day Saints] are the most prosocial members of American society,"** and "regardless of where they live, **they are very generous with their time and money.**"²⁹²

- If church members are among the most prosocial members of American society; isn't that a good thing for the members and their communities?
- Do critics of the Church volunteer more after they leave the Church? Do they donate more to charity? Are they better neighbors?
- Do former members of the Church regress to the average in generosity and volunteerism?
- Do former members still benefit from their religious upbringing? Do they have a leg up on virtuous, prosocial values?

If I left the Church, would I donate more to charity and volunteer more? Would my life be full of more light and truth?

Family History

“When our hearts turn to our ancestors, something changes inside us. We feel part of something greater than ourselves.” – RUSSELL M. NELSON, [Generations Linked in Love](#), April 2010 General Conference

Until 2021, I was rather indifferent to family history work. I figured I would get around to working on it when I was older. Family history was even less important to me when I considered leaving the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Then, I was called to be a temple and family history consultant and asked to develop a beginner's family history class. Our ward's leaders could not have called someone less qualified and less interested. I accepted the call, and I am so glad I did.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints emphasizes **turning our hearts to our ancestors** largely because of our doctrines and temple practices. Researchers have only recently discovered the **immense social and emotional benefits of doing family history**.

- Marshall Duke and Robyn Fivush of Emory University and Jennifer Bohanek of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill conducted a study to learn more about adolescents who know more about their family history. They concluded, **“Adolescents who report knowing more stories about their familial past show higher levels of emotional well-being, and also higher levels of identity achievement, even when controlling for general level of family functioning.”**²⁹³ (emphasis added)
- Martha Dreissneck, in the Journal of Family Nursing (2017), published a study about the importance of family stories. She concludes, **“Knowing one's family stories creates meaning that goes beyond the individual to provide a sense of self, through time, and in relation to family.** This expanded sense of self is referred to as our intergenerational self, which not only grounds an individual but also provides a larger context for understanding and dealing with life's experience(s) and challenges. **This connection across generations appears to contribute to resilience at all stages of life.”**²⁹⁴ (emphasis added)
- In 2011, Peter Fischer, Anne Saur, Claudia Vogrincic, and Silke Weisweiler from the University of Graz, the University of Berlin, and the University of Munich published a study in The European Journal of Social Psychology. Their study found that **“Thinking about one's genetic origin (i.e. ancestors) provides people with a positive psychological resource that increases their intellectual performance.”**²⁹⁵ (emphasis added)
- Robyn Fivush and Natalie Merrill of Emory University conclude in their 2016 paper **that family storytelling has immense benefits for storytellers (IE parents and grandparents) and story listeners (IE children).**²⁹⁶
- Rakesh Maurya from the University of Wisconsin shares the importance of family narratives in parenting. He claims that a family narrative is **“the way through which children and adolescents connect across generations to create self-identity.”** He says that “by anchoring oneself in family history, one develops **a sense of place and security** that may facilitate **self-confidence** and **self-competence**. Family stories help families pass on values, experiences, traditions, and important life lessons to the next generations.”²⁹⁷ (emphasis added)

When I read stories from my ancestors and write down my own stories, I have received firsthand the **immense benefits** discussed in the research above. In the last three years, I have emphasized family history and storytelling much more to my children. In a short period of time, I have already seen how family history gives my children and me a place in our family's story and a **stable sense of identity**.

- How do critics propose tapping into this well of family history benefits? **Would distancing myself from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints make family history and storytelling more likely?**
- Does the Church strengthen or weaken family ties? Do parents and children come closer together when someone leaves the Church? **Would I suddenly be closer to my family and community if I left the Church?**
- **What is the heritage of the critics of the Church? Who are their “heroes” about whom they can proudly share stories with their children?**

If family history becomes less important as I distance myself from the Church, how do critics propose that I replace this source of light and truth?

Delayed Gratification

“All that there is and ever can be is right now. And now. And now. And now.”

“There is no journey and no destination.”

-JEREMY RUNNELS, *“The Examined Life”*²⁹⁸

In high school, I sometimes wondered if this whole church thing was worth it. I wanted to have sex. I was curious to try alcohol. Friends made fun of me because I had never seen a rated-R movie. Some Sundays, the water on the lake was remarkably flat, and the weather was a perfect 85 degrees. At times, the Church felt like a wall that kept me from enjoying some of the pleasures of life. I remember vividly choosing to follow the Church's standards under the belief that my life would be better if I had self-control.

Members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints have ample opportunities to exercise delayed gratification. Tithing, fasting, dating norms, the word of wisdom, and the law of chastity are among the **sacrificial practices of Latter-day Saints that reinforce this behavior.** The ability to **postpone immediate rewards** in order to gain a future benefit is well documented to **improve one's health, wealth, and happiness.**^{299, 300}

In the oft-cited “[Marshmallow Experiment](#),”³⁰¹ published in 1972, Dr. Walter Mischel conducted an experiment in which 4–5-year-old children were given a marshmallow. He promised they could have a second one if they waited 15 minutes without eating the one provided. Some waited, and some did not. Researchers conducted follow-up studies and tracked each child's progression as the years passed. A number of different areas were tracked.

“The children who were willing to delay gratification and waited to receive the second marshmallow ended up having **higher SAT scores, lower levels of substance abuse, lower likelihood of obesity, better responses to stress, better social skills** as reported by their parents, and generally better scores in a range of other life measures. **The researchers followed each child for more than 40 years** and over and over again, **the group who waited patiently for the second marshmallow succeeded in whatever capacity they were measuring.** In other words, this series of experiments proved that the ability to delay gratification was critical for success in life.” (emphasis added) – James Clear “([40 Years of Stanford Research Found That People With This One Quality Are More Likely to Succeed](#))”³⁰²

In a [2012 study](#)³⁰³, researchers found that religious people, in particular, are better at delayed gratification. **Religious people tend to be less impulsive** in all sorts of decisions related to money, time, and other resources. Through religious beliefs and practices, people **“develop a more patient style of decision-making.”**³⁰⁴ (emphasis added)

One of the most pervasive narratives shared among critics is that the Church's sexual standards hurt people. Regarding delayed sexual gratification, Nicholas Wolfinger of the University of Utah summarizes a myriad of studies [with two key statements](#)³⁰⁵:

(1) “Americans reporting **one-lifetime sex partner** have the **happiest marriages.**” (emphasis added)

(2) “The difference between having one and more than one-lifetime sex partner is most consequential in predicting marital quality.”

- He also reports that [women with 0-1 sexual partners](#) before marriage are **the least likely to divorce.**³⁰⁶
- If I left the Church, would I be better at delayed gratification? **Have I captured enough delayed-gratification benefits from my religious upbringing that leaving the Church now would not adversely affect me?**
- **Do nihilists with no journey and no destination** produce better life outcomes?
- Is pursuing **every immediate pleasure** the path to more light and truth?

Jeremy Runnel's thoughts about life having no journey and no destination may work for privileged, upper-middle-class Americans. I marvel that I decided in high school to delay gratification based on the teachings of the Church of Jesus Christ. My life is immeasurably better due to those decisions made on faith all those years ago.

“It is a peculiarity of man that he can only live by looking to the future... And this is his salvation in the most difficult moments of his existence...**The prisoner who had lost faith in the future—his future—was doomed.** With his loss of belief in the future, he also **lost his spiritual hold**; he let himself decline and became subject to **mental and physical decay.**”³⁰⁷ (emphasis added) - DR. VIKTOR FRANKL, founder of Logotherapy and Nazi concentration camp survivor.

Real or Myth? | Antidepressants and LGBTQ+ Suicide Risk³⁰⁸

I genuinely feel bad for **former members** of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints who see the Church’s overwhelmingly positive benefits for members but **want to rationalize their leaving it.** For this reason, I believe some **critics cling to a couple of myths and misinterpretations.** For them, these misunderstandings need to be real.

Critics commonly cite two statistics as a means to paint the Church in a negative light. The first is that Utah ranks higher on average per capita in the usage of antidepressants. In the most recent data from 2019, Utah was 16th in the country.³⁰⁹ The second statistic is Utah’s higher-than-average suicide rate; more recently, in 2021, it was 14th in the country.³¹⁰ Using the statistics in the state of Utah on anti-depressant usage and higher-than-average suicide rate, **critics then make a major leap to their conclusion by suggesting that the Church and its teachings lead its members to be depressed.** Usually, **critics cite the above two pieces of information** without additional research to support that claim.

Because suicide and depression are deeply personal topics, I am choosing not to cite specific critics of the Church. I empathize with anyone who has lost a loved one due to mental health challenges or is currently supporting a loved one (including themselves) in a mental health crisis.

→ Suppose the premise suggested by critics above was universally true. Why **does Utah County**, with the highest percentage of Latter-day Saint population in Utah, **rank the lowest in antidepressant usage in Utah?**³¹¹

Why does Idaho, with its large Latter-day Saint population,³¹² rank below average on antidepressant usage?³¹³

In a 2016 *Journal of Scientific Study of Religion* study, **1.3 million people in the US were surveyed**, and **members of the Church** reported a **high number of positive emotional experiences and relatively high life satisfaction.**³¹⁴ If they are depressed, how is this possible?

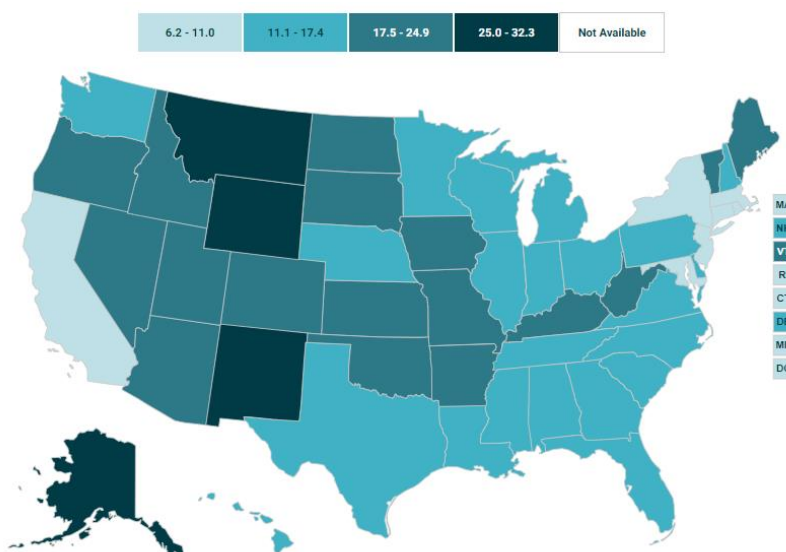
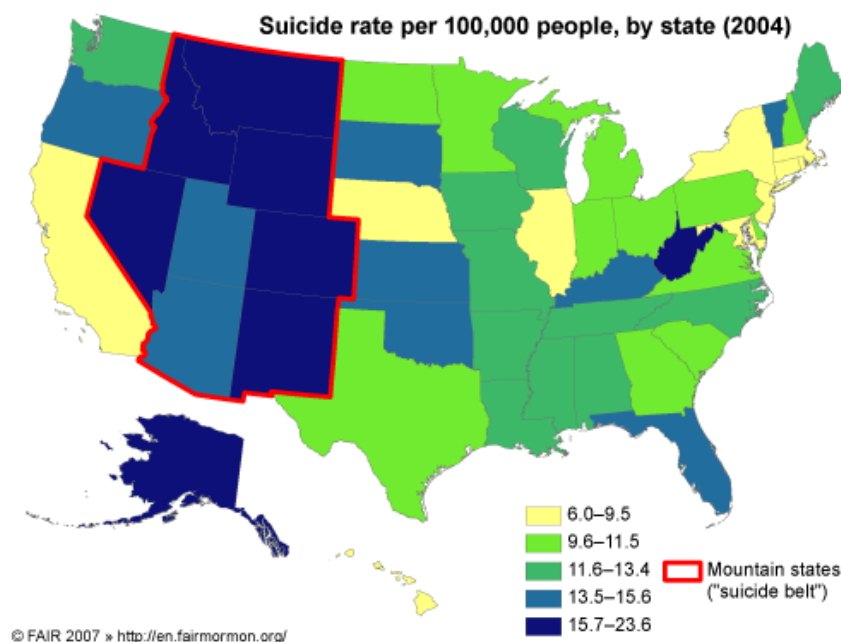
→ In a Gallup Well Being Survey in 2012, **Latter-day Saints and Jews had the highest well-being of any of the faith groups examined.**³¹⁵ How?

→ Why does the evidence consistently show that **Latter-day Saints are happy, well-adjusted, and fulfilled?** How is it possible that the Latter-day Saint religion can both help

in human flourishing and be the cause of higher-than-average anti-depressant usage and suicide risk in Utah?

The short answer is that we do not fully know, but there are several plausible theories:

- High Elevation – Several studies have identified a potential **link between altitude and depression/suicide rates**.^{316, 317, 318, 319, 320} A quick look at the location of suicide deaths will show a cluster around the Rocky Mountains and Alaska.³²¹ Interestingly, Utah is consistently ranked lower on the rate of suicide than other states in the Rocky Mountain/Alaska cluster.³²²



More recent data in 2021 from SHADAC,³²³ shows the suicide rate per 100,000 people.

- Gun ownership – It is believed that **states with fewer gun laws have more suicides per capita** relative to states with more gun laws.^{324, 325, 326}
- Happiness/Suicide Paradox – Utah, along with Scandinavian countries, is often cited as having high rates of happiness and suicide.^{327, 328}. **Scholars have suggested that the paradoxical decision to commit suicide might be driven by comparison effects.** This means depressed people can feel worse if they are in a broader context of happier people.
- Rurality – According to the CDC, “In the past two decades, **suicide rates have been consistently higher in rural America** than in urban America.”³²⁹
- Word of Wisdom – Some suggest that because Latter-day Saints do not drink alcohol, coffee, or smoke, they use antidepressants as coping mechanisms instead. There is, however, no solid evidence for this correlation.
- Larger families – Latter-day Saints have larger families, meaning our women go through postpartum more frequently than the average. This is an idea, but there is not enough evidence to support the claim yet.
- Mental Health Treatment Facilities - In 2020, **Utah was ranked the 7th highest out of 56 US states and territories in terms of the number of mental health facilities.**³³⁰ Wyoming, with 917 mental health facilities, was ranked #1. **California, with a population almost 13x greater than Utah, is ranked 53rd with only 79 facilities.**
 - A shallow reading of the number of mental health facilities may lead someone to believe Utah and Wyoming have a significant mental health crisis. The reality is that it is likely more economical for mental health facilities to bring clients from out of state to Utah and Wyoming than treat them in places like California. Additionally, the barriers to starting an addiction treatment center in Utah are significantly lower than in other states.³³¹
 - How many people come from out of state to Utah for treatment? Are the anti-depressants from out-of-state patients in Utah’s mental health facilities counted toward the total Utah anti-depressant usage?
- Juvenile treatment facilities - **Utah is the leader in the nation’s “troubled teen” industry,** receiving some 20,000 kids from all over the country from 2015 to 2022.³³² Far more than any other state. It is said that this is because Utah’s juvenile treatment facilities have a good track record, and Utah has favorable parental rights laws.³³³
 - Do these facilities use antidepressants for their clients? How much do they prescribe? Are the anti-depressants from out-of-state patients in Utah’s mental health facilities counted toward the total Utah anti-depressant usage?

The premise that the Church’s teachings and high standards lead people to be more depressed and commit suicide at higher rates is highly questionable. At a minimum, the issue is more complicated than critics portray. If anything, Utah’s high active membership rates in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints may **prevent** a hypothetically worse outcome for Utah.

Much could be shared regarding [Latter-day Saints' positive mental and emotional outcomes](#) from previous sections.³³⁴ This statement from Daniel Judd in "[Religiosity, Mental Health, and the Latter-day Saints: A Preliminary Review of Literature \(1923-95\)](#)" sums it up nicely:

"Analysis of the data indicates that Latter-day Saints who live their lives consistent with their religious beliefs experience greater general well-being and marital and family stability, and less delinquency, depression, anxiety, and substance abuse than those who do not. This review of research also concludes that there is very little support for the assertion made by some that religious belief, practice, or affiliation is antithetical to mental health."³³⁵ (emphasis added)

→ Isn't it **irresponsible for critics to universally claim that the Church of Jesus Christ is bad for mental health?** Especially when the opposite is much more likely?

LGBTQ+, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and Suicide

In 2019, the Utah Department of Health surveyed 86,000 Utah teens. In the group of LGBTQ identifying Latter-day Saint teens, an alarming 28% reported having seriously considered suicide in the last year.³³⁶ Latter-day Saint heterosexual teens had seriously considered suicide at a lower 13% rate in 2019.

The critics capitalize on this difference in suicide ideation and attempt to explain the gap with false accusations like:

"The Church's anti-LGBTQ policies are causing harm to our LGBTQ youth."

"LGBTQ youth do not feel safe and welcome in Latter-day Saint communities and thus commit acts of self-harm."

Both statements above are highly suspect and borderline dangerous. Dyer and Goodman point out in the same 2019 data set that [49% of Utah's non-religious LGBQ teens had seriously considered committing suicide compared to 22% of non-religious heterosexual teens](#). The national average for suicide ideation among LGB youth is 47.7%.³³⁷

When compared side by side:

	Utah LGBQ Teens	Utah Heterosexual Teens
LDS	28%	13%
No religion	49%	22%
2019 Sharp Survey, Utah Department of Health & Human Services		

→ The question we should be asking is, **what is the Church doing in Utah to significantly reduce the amount of suicidal ideation among LGBQ-identifying teens?** For the LGBQ teens, that **reduction is over 42%.**

Dr. Michael Staley, the Suicide Prevention Coordinator at the Utah Office of the Medical Examiner, admits that friction between [LGBT sexuality and religion in Utah may not be the driving factor behind suicide among Utah's youth](#).³³⁸ **Despite the common narrative that Utah's youth suicides arise from intended and unintended intolerance toward LGBT people,** Dr. Staley states, **"There's no data to show that, period."** (emphasis added) Dr. Staley attributes Utah's higher-than-average suicide rate to reduced oxygen to the brain because of Utah's higher elevation.³³⁹

“Congratulations, Mr. Staley. Your “research” is already being used by mormon apologists to ‘prove’ the church is not responsible for Utah’s dead queers... So, mission accomplished, I guess?” – Comment on an article summarizing Dr. Staley’s research.³⁴⁰

- When Dr. Staley pushed back on the connection between suicidality in Utah and the Church, why did so many critics get upset? Wouldn’t **correctly understanding** the correlation between the Church, LGBTQ+ issues, and suicide be **vital information**?
- Why do some critics want it to be true that the Church harms our LGBTQ+-identifying members when that claim seems to be untrue or at least unclear?

Depression and suicide are serious issues, and we within the Church and those who have left have a responsibility to care for those who are struggling. **We must not float overly simple, false theories that do more damage than good.**

For more on this topic, please read the LGBTQ+ Concerns and Questions section.

If you or someone you know needs help, please consider some of these resources:³⁴¹

- Call: 1-800-273-TALK (8255) for the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline
- Text: HOME to 741-741 for free, 24-hour support from the Crisis Text Line
- Download the SafeUT app (it will connect a person directly with a crisis line)
- The Family Acceptance Project: <https://familyproject.sfsu.edu/>
- Suicide Prevention Resource Center: www.sprc.org
- National Alliance of Mental Illness (NAMI): www.nami.org
- Parent Resource Program: www.jasonfoundation.com/community/
- Resources on suicide from The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints: <https://www.lds.org/get-help/suicide>
- Resources for LGBTQ+ Latter-day Saints: <https://mormonandgay.lds.org/>
- Resources for LGBTQ+ Latter-day Saints (local groups in Idaho): beaconssaministry.org

Fruits of the Church Conclusion

“*Biggest mistake of my life was raising my kids in the church.*” – X (Twitter) user

“*I’ve done so much of the work of deconstructing the self-hatred the church instilled in me.*” – X (Twitter) user

“*I just want them to admit that their Hate hurts & kills.*” – User on exmormon reddit

- What church are these disillusioned former members talking about? **It sounds nothing like the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.** I’ve attended different wards and stakes in different states and countries for decades. These comments imply teachings that are nothing like the lessons I have heard in primary, young men’s, elder’s quorum, Sunday school, sacrament meeting, the temple, or general conference. Sure, we’ve all heard the occasional ridiculous comment from a brother or sister in the ward. That’s the risk of

building a community based on geographic boundaries. But there is beauty in giving grace and forgiving one another.

- Wouldn't it be more honest for the disenchanted folks quoted above to say, "my parents" or "my specific church leader" instead of "the Church"? Wouldn't that be more accurate?

A stable identity is one of the greatest gifts the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has given me. I know who I am, where I fit in the story, and where I am going.

"My dear friends, **you are literally spirit children of God.** You have sung this truth since you learned the words to [the primary song] 'I Am a Child of God.' But is that eternal truth imprinted upon your heart? Has this truth rescued you when confronted with temptation? I fear that you may have heard this truth so often that it sounds more like a slogan than divine truth. And yet, the way you think about who you really are affects almost every decision you will ever make.

... **So who are you?** First and foremost, **you are a child of God, a child of the covenant, and a disciple of Jesus Christ.** As you embrace these truths, our Heavenly Father will help you reach your ultimate goal of living eternally in His holy presence.

... I promise that you will experience spiritual growth, freedom from fear, and a confidence that you can scarcely imagine now. You will have the strength to have a positive influence far beyond your natural capacity. **And I promise that your future will be more exhilarating than anything you can presently believe.**" – Russell M. Nelson ("[Choices for Eternity](#)," Worldview Devotional for Young Adults, May 15, 2022, emphasis added)

- Ultimately, **I have to teach my children something.** Why not a stable identity? Eternal self-worth and hope? Self-reliance and hard work? Faith in Jesus Christ? That their future will be exhilarating?
- We will all experience hardship in this life. Why not experience it with hope, gratitude, community, forgiveness, and purpose?

Women in the Church

Questions & Concerns

“Mormon women were encouraged to suffer abuse.” – X (Twitter) user

“A woman’s perspective on what it all feels like... It’s miserable. The damage is ground into you from birth so even when you leave [the Church], the pain doesn’t stop, and even when you heal, you don’t. Explaining the full extent of it would be a very sad, very long book.”³⁴² – Reddit User

Comments like those above challenged my perspective on women in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Women’s issues have taken center stage in recent years. I care deeply for the women in my life, and I had to examine if the Church is a good and safe place to raise my daughters. Critics would have me believe that women are deeply damaged because of their upbringing or conversion to the Church of Jesus Christ. Is there a devil in the details of our doctrines and practices? Are millions of women around the world secretly suffering?

As reported in a 2009 NBER paper, Stevenson and Wolfers discuss the **paradox of declining female happiness since the 1970s**.³⁴³ Significant changes have been made in women's issues, including increases in real wages, educational attainment, control over fertility, and technological improvements. Given these rapid changes, Stevenson and Wolfers explain that they expected an improvement in female net happiness, especially relative to men. However, the opposite is happening.

"By many objective measures the lives of women in the United States have improved over the past 35 years, yet we show that **measures of subjective well-being indicate that women's happiness has declined both absolutely and relative to men**."³⁴⁴ (emphasis added)

→ Why are women less happy now?

Right or wrong, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has, in recent years, become a punching bag for women's issues.

- Why do critics not highlight how our doctrine of the fall is the most generous to Eve and womanhood in Christianity? **In our gospel story, isn't Eve a hero, not a villain?** Aren't women revered, not reviled, in our theology because of Eve?
- Doesn't our doctrine **exalt women** in God's plan? Isn't it the case that our doctrine teaches that **men and women cannot reach their full potential without each other?**
- Doesn't the Church's 1995 doctrinal statement "[The Family: A Proclamation to the World](#)" teach that "fathers and mothers are obligated to help one another as **equal partners**"? (emphasis added)
- Compared to much of Christianity, don't the **women of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints have far more teaching, preaching, and leadership responsibilities?** Don't our women teach at the pulpit? Serve as "youth pastors?" Aren't women involved in the ward council, which oversees the entire ward?

Do any other Christian churches acknowledge the **divine feminine** like the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints does?

How Religious Men Affect the Women and Children Around Them

Meagan Kohler, a contributor for Deseret News and Public Square Magazine, highlights how **women's happiness in the Church cannot be separated from the moral development of men**.³⁴⁵ Meagan shares the following observations:

- "Priesthood service in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints — wherein lay men serve in various unique capacities — helps **teach men of all ages how to care for others**." (emphasis added)
- **"Nearly a quarter of American children are raised in single parent families and over 80% of single parents are women.** The poverty rate for these families is **nearly five times higher than for married couple families** — with **women and children making up 70% of**

our nation's poor.³⁴⁶ These women and children are also at higher risk for substance abuse, domestic abuse, violent crimes and deaths of despair. They experience much lower economic mobility and are far more likely to experience intergenerational poverty, mental illness and incarceration." (emphasis added)

- **"Utah, where religiosity is high, has the lowest childhood poverty rate**³⁴⁷ in the nation, and the second lowest for women.³⁴⁸ Poor children also have higher economic mobility. According to Gallup, Utah consistently ranks in the **top 10 states for well-being,**³⁴⁹ which looks at career satisfaction, social connection and health. **Strong families**³⁵⁰ **generate stability and social capital for Utah's women and children.**" (emphasis added)
- "80% of violent crimes and virtually all sexual assault is committed by men... **Religiosity, as measured through attendance, significantly reduces the risk of domestic partner violence,** especially in the most vulnerable populations.³⁵¹ According to a 2007 study published in the social science journal *Violence Against Women*, **'Men who attend religious services several times a week are 72% less likely to abuse their female partners than men from comparable backgrounds who do not attend services.'**"³⁵² (emphasis added)

In a 2002 study ("Religious Involvement and Domestic Violence Among U.S. Couples"), researchers found that **regular religious attendance is inversely associated with the perpetration of domestic violence.**³⁵³ This inverse relationship is strong even when controlling for social integration, social support, alcohol and substance abuse, and low self-esteem and depression.

Religious Couples Relationship Outcomes

In his 2020 article "The Influence of Religiosity/Spirituality on Sex Life Satisfaction and Sexual Frequency," Stephen Cranney reports:

"Religious couples – as measured by reading scriptures together, praying and attending worship services jointly – tend to have **better relationship outcomes, including improved intimacy.**"³⁵⁴ (emphasis added)

According to a study by the Wheatley Institution and Stephen Cranney in the *Reviews of Religious Research*, **married religious couples have more frequent sex and better quality sex than their non-religious counterparts.**³⁵⁵

"Women in highly religious relationships were twice as likely as their secular peers to say they were **satisfied with their sexual relationships.**"³⁵⁶ (emphasis added)

"United religious couples in the Wheatley analysis reported **higher emotional closeness, commitment, and partner virtues.**"³⁵⁷ (emphasis added)

Women who feel securely attached to their partners are less depressed and happier in their relationships and have better memory functions, according to a 2014 study.³⁵⁸

As stated in a previous section, multiple studies and survey datasets ranging from 1985 to 2024 consistently show that **Latter-day Saints have the lowest divorce rates** compared to other religious and non-religious groups.³⁵⁹ In a 2018 study, Thomas Leopold found that while divorce had differing negative consequences for men and women, **women were more likely to experience chronic strain from divorce.**³⁶⁰

→ Isn't an organization that gives **men responsibility and teaches them how to care for others** good for society? Isn't that a **huge net positive for women**?

Aren't women clearly benefitted by the Church, its teachings, and its impact on men?

→ **Do the critics of the Church have a better program for women to reach higher levels of human flourishing?** A program that leads to **more fulfilled, happier, stable lives for women**?

Married Women vs. Unmarried Women

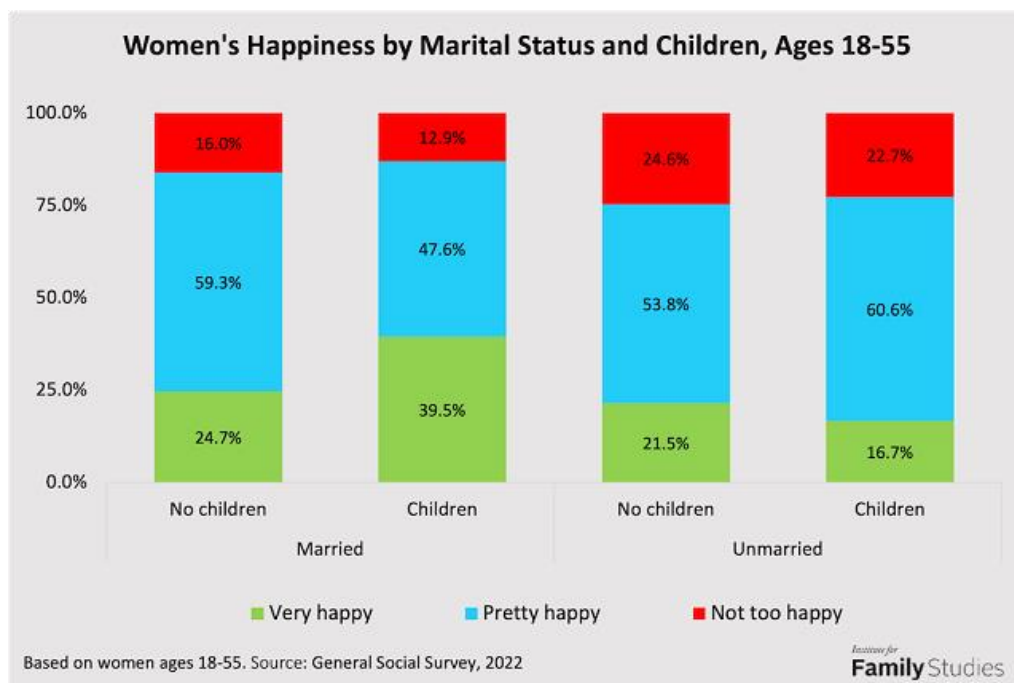
"LDS leaders [are obsessed] with making members married as fast as possible [it] costs marriages and lives." – X (Twitter) user.

Brad Wilcox and Wendy Wang share the following about the cultural narrative regarding marriage and parenthood.³⁶¹

"Social media and mainstream media are replete with stories suggesting marriage and parenthood are not fulfilling, especially for women. Not surprisingly, many Americans now believe the key to being happy is a good education, work, and freedom from the encumbrances of family life—not getting married and having a family." (emphasis added)

Is the cultural narrative true? Are single, childless women happier on average?

As reported in the [2022 edition of the General Social Survey \(GSS\)](#):³⁶²



The GSS shows that a **combination of marriage and parenthood is linked to the most significant happiness dividends for women.**

BYU as a Case Study for Women's Safety

Campus climate surveys conducted at universities across the nation consistently report that anywhere from 19%-25% of university women experience unwanted sexual contact.³⁶³ For LGBT+ identifying students, that rate is much higher, ranging from 33%-73%.

According to campus client surveys conducted in 2017 and 2022, a **drastically lower 7.4% of women at Brigham Young University (BYU) and 17% of BYU LGBT+** identifying individuals experienced some form of unwanted sexual contact.³⁶⁴ The data from BYU-Idaho were even lower. Of those unwanted interactions, victims reported that 50-55% of perpetrators were not affiliated with BYU.

- **Why are women so much safer at Brigham Young University?** Is there another school I would rather have my girls attend?

Women in the Church Conclusion

Regarding women's issues, the anti-religious cultural movement is winning. Women in the US today have fewer children. They delay marriage or avoid it altogether. Same-sex orientation has surged in recent years.³⁶⁵ Over 800,000 abortions are performed every year.³⁶⁶ More women participate in the workforce, though slightly less than in 1999.³⁶⁷ For secularist critics, all of these factors are major wins.

- I am not a woman, and I suppose each person can define what is happiness and flourishing. Likewise, I do not want to minimize the experiences of women who have left the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. With that said, I do have eyes and ears. Do critics agree that **less abuse, lower poverty, better marriages, less divorce, less sexual violence, less domestic violence, longer lives, stronger communities, higher reported well-being, and higher reported happiness** are reasonable indications that women in the Church are doing well? What else would the critics want to see?
- If women in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are suffering so much, why doesn't that come through in the data? Why does the opposite seem to be true? Do critics have any evidence beyond personal examples?

Are women outside the Church better off? If they are not better off, what are the critics offering my wife and my daughters if they leave?

Temples and Ancient Connections

Questions & Concerns

“Former Mormon lifts the lid on church's 'creepy' baptisms for the DEAD that sees children being put through 'traumatizing' ceremonies to 'save' those who have passed away” – Article title of a March 17th, 2024 DailyMail.com article³⁶⁸

“Joseph was just copying the masons. He wasn't creative enough to come up with something original. Interesting that Mason and Mormon both start with the letter "M" and end in "on." Coincidence? Maybe he wanted them to sound similar.” – User on Exmormon.org³⁶⁹

The temple has always been a special place to me. My first time going to the temple as a 12-year-old is a memory I will never forget. Sitting in white, I sat in the baptistry with my mother, taking it all in. For a period in high school, I would go to the temple by myself monthly to sit in the small forest on the Seattle temple property. That was a great comfort to me. When I received my initiatory, I felt like an army of temple workers were there just for my special day. My sister-in-law gave me good advice for the endowment: “Just relax, take it all in, and enjoy the experience.” So, I did, and I loved it. Through different seasons of my life, I have been to the temple more often and sometimes less often, but it has always been a place of contemplation and peace.

Critics emphasized to me how strange our temple is and how jarring it was going through for their first time. They talked about how traumatizing getting baptized in the temple several times was. They mention how boring or pointless the temple ceremonies are. None of this troubled me much. It wasn't until I learned about the parallels between the temple endowment and freemasonry that I felt unsettled.

Freemasonry

Joseph Smith became a freemason on March 16, 1842, and introduced the temple endowment on May 3, 1842.³⁷⁰ Similarities (and many differences) exist between freemasonry and the temple endowment. Critics claim that the temple endowment came into being only after Joseph Smith became a freemason. If that is true, then how do critics explain the following?

- **20 years before he became a freemason, [Joseph Smith's First Vision](#) contains echoes and allusions to the [temple endowment](#).**³⁷¹
- In 1823, nearly **20 years before Joseph Smith Jr. became a freemason**, he first saw the plates. Joseph Smith Sr. reported to a non-Mormon friend, Fayette Lapham, that **the metal plates had a title page or cover page with the masonic symbols of the compass and the square**, with the interpreters overlaid on top of them.³⁷² Joseph Smith Sr. died in 1840, two years before Joseph Smith Jr. became a freemason.
- **14 years before Joseph Smith became a freemason**, the **lost 116 pages** of the Book of Mormon translation had elements and indications of the **temple endowment**.³⁷³
- **13 years before Joseph Smith became a freemason**, the **book of Nephi** was dictated containing elements of the **temple endowment in Nephi's and Lehi's visions** (1 Nephi 8-13).
- **13 years before Joseph Smith became a freemason**, the Book of Mormon contains **all of the elements of the temple endowment**. In particular, King Benjamin's address in the Book of Mosiah.³⁷⁴
 - **King Benjamin's sermon was for those who had proven themselves worthy** ([Mosiah 1:11](#))
 - **A New Name** ([Mosiah 5:11-12](#))
 - **A warning to not trifle with sacred things** ([Mosiah 2:9](#))
 - **Discussion of the Creation, Garden of Eden, and the Fall of Adam** [Mosiah 2:20-41](#) and [Mosiah 3:25-26](#), and [Mosiah 4:7-8](#)
 - **Rebirth formula used at the coronation of kings and the imagery of a king seated on the right hand of God** ([Mosiah 5:7,9](#))
 - **Obedience** ([Mosiah 5:2,5](#))
 - **Sacrifice** ([Mosiah 2:3-4](#))
 - **The Law of the Gospel** ([Mosiah 3](#) – Remission of sins through Jesus Christ. [Mosiah 4](#) – Repentance, faith, keeping commandments, and care for the poor and needy.)
 - **Chastity** ([Mosiah 4:30](#))
 - **Consecration** ([Mosiah 2:34](#))
 - **Taking upon us the name of Christ** ([Mosiah 5: 6-8](#))
 - **Unified prayer offered, accompanied by a symbolic posture** ([Mosiah 4:1-3](#))
 - **Promised sealing blessings** ([Mosiah 5:15](#))
- **13 years before Joseph Smith became a freemason**, the **book of Ether** was translated, which contains elements of the **temple endowment** ([Ether 3](#)).
- Between **11 and 6 years before Joseph Smith became a freemason**, the Lord told Joseph Smith that the Lord's people are to be **endowed with power** ([D&C 38:32, 38](#), [D&C 95:8](#), [D&C 105:12, 18, 33](#), [D&C 110:9](#))

- **1 year before Joseph Smith became a freemason**, the Lord revealed in [D&C 124:39-42](#) (emphasis added):

“Therefore, verily I say unto you, that your anointings, and your washings, and your baptisms for the dead, and your solemn assemblies, and your memorials for your sacrifices by the sons of Levi, and for your oracles in your most holy places wherein you receive conversations, and your statutes and judgments, for **the beginning of the revelations and foundation of Zion, and for the glory, honor, and endowment of all her municipals, are ordained by the ordinance of my holy house**, which my people are always commanded to build unto my holy name. And verily I say unto you, let this house be built unto my name, that I may reveal mine ordinances therein unto my people; For I deign to reveal unto my church things which have been kept hid from before the foundation of the world, things that pertain to the dispensation of the fulness of times. **And I will show unto my servant Joseph all things pertaining to this house**, and the priesthood thereof, and the place whereon it shall be built.”

→ How do critics account for the **various parts of the endowment being present in Joseph Smith’s life and teachings long before the Nauvoo endowment ceremony** was created in 1842?

In early 1838, Joseph Smith left Kirtland and the temple behind, and eventually, most of the saints did as well. Nearly a year later, from Liberty Jail in March 1839, he wrote the following in a personal letter:

“I never have had [the] opportunity to give [the Saints] the plan that God has revealed to me.”³⁷⁵

Later in 1839, Parly Pratt reports that Joseph,

“taught me many great and glorious principles concerning God and the heavenly order of eternity. It was at this time that I received from him the first idea **of eternal family organization**, and the eternal union of the sexes.” (emphasis added)³⁷⁶

Before the rollout of the endowment ceremony in 1842, it seemed clear that Joseph Smith had much more to say about the “great and glorious principles concerning God.”

Ancient Temple Connections

“I spent the day in the upper part of the store, ... in council with General James Adams, of Springfield, Patriarch Hyrum Smith, Bishops Newel K. Whitney and George Miller, and President Brigham Young and Elders Heber C. Kimball and Willard Richards, instructing them in the principles and order of the Priesthood, attending to **washings, anointings, endowments** and the communication of keys pertaining to the Aaronic Priesthood, and so on to the highest order of the Melchizedek Priesthood, setting forth the order pertaining to the Ancient of Days, and all those plans and principles by which anyone is enabled to secure the fullness of those blessings which have been prepared for the Church of the First Born, and come up and abide in the presence of the Eloheim in the eternal worlds. In this council

was instituted the **ancient order of things** for the first time in these last days." - Joseph Smith, History of the Church, 5:1–2.

While some parallels exist between freemasonry and the Latter-day Saint temple endowment, the vast differences are the most informative. Unlike the freemasonry rituals, the temple emphasizes creation, fall, redemption, and enthronement concepts. These same ideas are a **near-universal feature of temple rites in the ancient Near East**,³⁷⁷ concepts that Joseph Smith would not have known about in 1842. Like freemasonry, ancient Near East rituals included ritualistic handclasps and sacred embraces.³⁷⁸

Ancient Egyptian temple rites commonly emphasize six main topics, similar to the Latter-day Saint endowment but unlike freemasonry.³⁷⁹ Namely, 1). Primordial written document on which the rites are based; 2). Purification through anointing, lustration, and clothing; 3). Creation; 4). Garden; 5). Travel; 6). Ascension, including victory, coronation, and admission to the heavenly company. Like ancient Near East temple rites, these topics would have been unknown in 1842. Moreover, ritualistic handclasps and sacred embraces are found throughout ancient Egyptian iconography.³⁸⁰ (Images below are courtesy of "[The Sacred Embrace and the Sacred Handclasp in Ancient Mediterranean Religions](#)" by Stephen Ricks in the *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship*)



Figure 1: The Divine Horus (with a falcon head) embraces the Royal Horus on the Qa Hedjet Stela

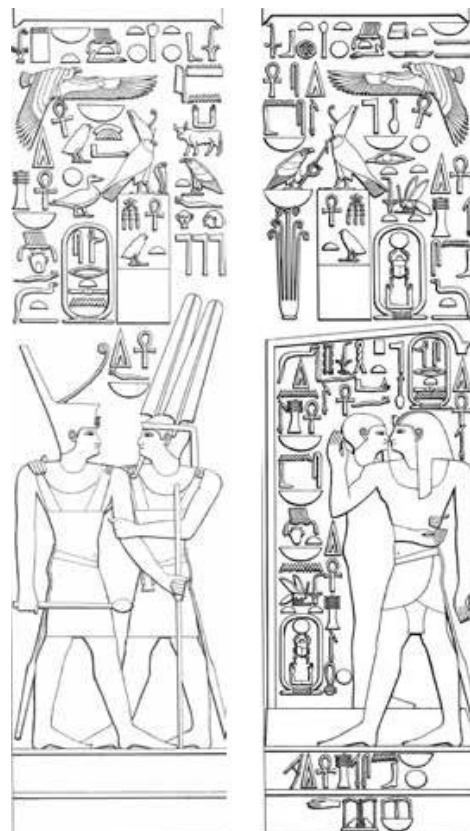


Figure 2: Left: The pharaoh Senwosret faces the god Amon, who embraces him. Right: Senwosret is embraced by Ptah, who faces him from the left.

In ancient Chinese tradition, Fuxi and Nüwa are revered as the first humans created.³⁸¹ On the right, **Fuxi is usually depicted holding a square**, while on the left, **Nüwa holds a compass**.³⁸² Their story also shows temple patterns. Fuxi is often portrayed as “a man wearing animal skins.”³⁸³ He offered the first open-air sacrifice to heaven on a mountain and introduced the institution of marriage.³⁸⁴ As with the other ancient traditions, it is implausible that these ideas would have been known to Joseph Smith in 1842.



Source: [Fuxi and Nüwa](#). Hanging scroll. Color on silk. Located at the Chinese History Museum. Image via *Wikipedia*. (On the left is Nüwa holding a compass and on the right is Fuxi holding a square.)

Early Christian writings and apocryphal texts discuss the following interesting parallels to our modern temple ceremony: **Baptism for the dead**, initiation (including **washing, anointing, and investiture**), **new names, handclasps, secret words, prayer circles, passing the angels, admittance into God’s presence** and so on.³⁸⁵ Joseph Smith would not have picked up most of these concepts in Freemasonry. Likewise, most of these early Christian texts would have been unavailable to him in 1842.

It is believed that when apocryphal and scriptural texts refer to “**mystery**,” the lost, intended meaning is “**ordinance**.”³⁸⁶ Compelling evidence suggests that Christ initiated his disciples into the “mysteries of the kingdom,” and those teachings perhaps persisted until the 5th century AD.³⁸⁷

→ How did Joseph Smith know about ancient, early Christian ceremonies/rituals only discovered after 1842? How did Joseph **recover ancient temple practices and concepts** without source material beyond his revelations?

Why do critics ignore these critical connections to modern temple ordinances?

If Joseph Smith and Brigham Young restored ancient temple rituals that date back to Adam's time, shouldn't we expect to find many examples of those same ordinances, albeit altered, across cultures?

Once I considered rituals and symbols across time and different cultures, I saw shadows of the temple endowment in modern-day ceremonies. High school and college graduates wear **special robes** and transfer their graduation tassels from **left to right**. Witnesses in court lay their hand on a Bible and **raise their arm to the square**. A royal **coronation** is done in a particular place where the individual is consecrated with oil, an oath is administered at an altar, the oath includes questions and affirmative responses, the ceremony includes special clothing, caps or crowns are worn, and various tokens are brought forth to be held in specific hands.³⁸⁸



→ The reality is that the endowment has as many, if not more, connections to ancient temple traditions and coronation ceremonies as it does to Freemasonry. Why do critics emphasize the Freemasonry connections and completely ignore the more substantial ancient connections?

The more I understood about the temple, the more I asked myself, what ancient source connects all of these ritualistic and mythological traditions? I've learned that the symbols and themes of the latter-day saint endowment are everywhere. All I had to do was look.

Hezekiah, Josiah, and the Deuteronomists

Some biblical scholars, including non-Latter-day Saint Margaret Barker, deduce that King Hezekiah, around 750 BC, and later King Josiah, around 620 BC, initiated **radical reforms to the Israelite religion and temple worship**.³⁸⁹ The group that supported King Josiah in these reforms is called **"the Deuteronomists"** and is often credited with shaping the books of Deuteronomy, Judges, Joshua, 1 and 2 Samuel, and 1 and 2 Kings. [The theory is that after the Deuteronomists' reforms, the Israelite religion was "de-Christianized."](#)³⁹⁰ (emphasis added)

In [2 Kings 22:1-2](#) Josiah is portrayed as the story's hero, "And he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, and walked in all the ways of David his father, and turned not aside to the right hand or to the left."

In [2 Chronicles 34: 3-7](#), King Josiah's reforms include purging Judah and Jerusalem. He purged the groves, carved images, and molten images. He broke down altars and burned the bones of the priests upon their altars, while beating graven images into powder.

Did Josiah do enough, or did he go too far?

"The key event was the **great purge in the time of King Josiah** at the end of the seventh century BCE, when everything that the Deuteronomists deemed impure was removed from the temple and destroyed (2 Kings 23). This is not an objective account, and it is easy to see that **most of what King Josiah removed were the religious artifacts and practices of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob**, and almost all the kings in Jerusalem. They had survived in the land until the sixth century BCE – **sacred trees, pillars, places outside Jerusalem to offer sacrifice** – but King Josiah removed everything that did not conform to the Moses religion as set out in Deuteronomy. In other words, the 'Moses' religion with the ten commandments and the Aaron priesthood did not finally replace the Abrahamic faith and the Melchizedek priesthood until just before the first temple was destroyed." – Margaret Barker, "Temple Theology"³⁹¹

"Almost everything that Josiah swept away can be matched in the religion of the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob."³⁹²

Ultimately, we do not know the extent of the changes made during King Josiah's reform or how the temple ceremony changed.

It is believed that before the Josiah reforms, **the Israelite religion taught about an atoning Messiah**.³⁹³ In the Book of Mormon, Lehi, a contemporary of King Josiah and the Deuteronomists, represented a faction of Israelites who did not appreciate the changes. The Jews wanting to kill Lehi when he prophesied of a Messiah ([1 Nephi 1:19-20](#)) places him acutely in conflict with the Deuteronomists. Laman and Lemuel classify the people of

Jerusalem as righteous because they kept the laws of Moses (1 Nephi 17:22), which would put them in the camp of the pro-Josiah reformists.

It makes sense that Lehi would emphasize **the atoning Messiah** and the **Tree of Life** because those elements were believed to have been removed from temple worship during the reforms.³⁹⁴ He was, in short, preserving **the plain and precious truths**. What is more precious than preserving the knowledge of the Messiah?

“After they had slain the Messiah, who should come, and after he had been slain he should rise from the dead, and should make himself manifest, by the Holy Ghost, unto the Gentiles... the remnants of the house of Israel should be grafted in, or come to the knowledge of the true Messiah, their Lord and their Redeemer.” (1 Nephi 10:11,14).

→ If this concept of pre-Josiah temple worship and Israelite religion is genuine, how did Joseph Smith know about them?

Nephi refers to the “plain and precious things which have been taken away” in 1 Nephi 13 in a prophecy of the last days. Was Nephi borrowing language from his father, Lehi, who had the same complaint about the gospel in his day?

From what we know, there are numerous probable connections between ancient pre-Josiah Israelite temples and modern Latter-day Saint temples. These include **belief in a divine Father and Mother, the Tree of Life, teachings about the creation, fall, atonement, and a suffering Messiah who would gain victory over death.**³⁹⁵

→ How do critics account for these ancient connections in modern-day temple rituals? Was Joseph Smith just lucky?

Temple and Ancient Connections Conclusion

Depending on the day, I hear critics say that Joseph Smith was an anti-Mason and that the Gadianton robbers were fashioned after them. The next day, I could hear critics tell me that Joseph loved the Freemasons and plagiarized them. The reality is that **the temple ordinances of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints have inexplicable ancient origins** that Joseph Smith would not have known about. Plus, the temple initiatory and endowment elements were present in Joseph’s experience since the First Vision. During my search for more light and truth, I was astonished at Joseph Smith’s ability to **restore ancient temple customs and practices**. Crediting Joseph’s ability to restore ancient traditions solely on freemasonry is **too simple**. Freemasonry does not remotely explain this connection.

Testimony and Spiritual Witnesses

Questions & Concerns

“If God’s method to revealing truth is through feelings, it is a very ineffective and unreliable method.” – JEREMY RUNNELS, CES Letter

“I struggle almost daily with my testimony, but I don’t plan on ever giving up. My current question I am struggling with is how to know whether spiritual experiences I have had were real or if they were born out of confirmation bias. Does anyone have any thoughts, scriptures or reading material relevant to the question?” – Reddit User³⁹⁶

When I debated whether to leave the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, two things concerned me if I left. The first was the Book of Mormon. The second was several **powerful spiritual experiences** I had had over the years. If I was honest with myself, I could not adequately explain them. I knew critics minimize “the Spirit” as just personal feelings manifesting themselves. Perhaps that would explain some of what I had been through, but certainly not all.

Critics of the Church who criticize the invitation from missionaries, church leaders, and the Book of Mormon to pray and ask God for the truth of all things must **explain spiritual experiences away**. *Secularists attempt to rationalize a testimony from the Holy Ghost with counter-neurological and psychological explanations.*³⁹⁷

The Backfire Effect ³⁹⁸	When additional evidence is presented, an individual becomes more convinced of their original conviction.
Cognitive Dissonance ³⁹⁹	Discomfort a person feels when their behavior does not align with their values or beliefs.
Confirmation Bias ⁴⁰⁰	Tendency to search for and interpret information in a way that confirms one's prior beliefs or values.
Elevation Emotion ⁴⁰¹	Emotional response to moral beauty. Motivates an individual to open up or to action after witnessing acts of compassion or virtue.
Frisson ⁴⁰²	Aesthetic chills or psychogenic shivers.
Intuition ⁴⁰³	An unconscious form of knowledge without apparent deliberation.
The Illusory Truth Effect ⁴⁰⁴	When false information is repeated, individuals often believe it is true.
The God Helmet ⁴⁰⁵	An experiment where subtle stimulation of the temporal lobes resulted in participants feeling a "sensed presence."

→ Any one or multiple of the critics' explanations could explain some members' experiences. However, how do they account for the collective following?⁴⁰⁶

- Early Latter-day Saints were persecuted, mocked, tortured, murdered, and driven from state to state. The Kirtland bank failed. Governor Boggs issued an extermination order. Some leaders left the Church. The prophet was killed. **What gave the early saints the strength and encouragement to press onward?** Why did they do it? Didn't they have every reason to abandon the cause? **Do critics really believe they endured all that because of *confirmation bias* or *elevated emotion*?**
- Members of the early Church went to great lengths to finish the Kirtland and Nauvoo temples. The already poor saints donated money, means, and time to building those buildings. My ancestor, Nicholas Silcock, was one of the carpenters who worked on the Nauvoo temple. His wife, my ancestor Jane Heath, sold clothes and valuables to buy food so Nicholas could continue working on the temple. They sold other treasures to purchase curtains and trimmings for the temple. **Were my ancestors *manipulated* into making all of those sacrifices? Did they succumb to the *backfire effect*, as the critics may suggest?**
- After the death of Joseph and Hyrum Smith, under Brigham Young's direction, the saints worked day and night to complete the Nauvoo temple. They did so, knowing that they would soon be expelled from Nauvoo. How did thousands of saints have the motivation to complete the temple? What drove them to finish that building? **Did they experience *cognitive dissonance*?**

- How do the secular explanations explain the faith and devotion of thousands of Mormon pioneers? Some were driven from New York to Ohio, Missouri, Illinois, and Utah, but never wavered. Do the critics really believe that these devoted, dedicated saints never stopped to ask themselves why they were doing what they were doing? **Can that level of devotion be explained by having a “frenzied mind”?** (Alma 30:16)
- If I left the Church and had to face my pioneer ancestors someday, what would I tell them? **That their spiritual experiences were the result of neurological issues?**
- **Did Christ’s disciples testify of Christ’s resurrection at their own peril and death because of *frisson*?**
- How do the critics explain the millions of church members, past and present, who gave up their lives in service to God?
- What do the critics think about that night in high school in the fall of 2003 when I was in a dark place, and Jesus rescued me? **He saved me from my anguish and despair. Was that *confirmation bias*? How was I able to go on?**
- Do critics believe that my unexpected sacred experience outside my home in 2017 resulted from ***the illusory truth effect***? **What about the countless other whisperings and promptings?**
- How do critics account for the **millions of experiences and answers to prayers across time from millions of people?** How about the strength given to countless people yearning for God and receiving answers?

→ These examples are not proof of why someone beyond the self should believe. However, isn’t it **farfetched to sweep all these devotion-causing experiences under the “rug” of neurological or psychological triggers?** Is there a reason critics attempt to tone down the divine and reinterpret it as some *misfire in the brain* or *manipulation* from an external source? The longer I listened to **critics**, the more I saw them **twisting themselves into knots to explain spiritual experiences away.**

Only a few months after my confession that I was not sure about God, I was sitting in my car **sipping on a Dr. Pepper**. I was also eating a slice of **beef jerky** and had a **bag of candy** sitting in the passenger seat, with **music** blasting through the speakers, and **playing a game** on my phone. Why? I was about to leave my employment. It was a difficult decision that would disappoint my colleagues. I knew that their feelings would be hurt. Once I stepped through those doors and delivered my resignation letter, my life would be forever changed. I would have to sell my house and move out of state. My wife had finally made some good friends in our community, and now I was asking her to leave that behind. I wasn’t sure how we would make ends meet. Suffice it to say, **I was a nervous wreck.**

I had a moment of self-awareness and looked at myself. I was doing everything I knew to do to comfort myself. It was a sad and pathetic scene. I turned off the music, put the snacks away, and put the phone in my pocket. I sat in quiet reflection and said a simple prayer. **“God, please comfort me.”** I felt an exhilarating feeling of peace and warmth and a wave of enthusiasm for the future. Finally, I had the courage to do what I set out to do.

Could I minimize this simple but profound experience as some mental survival mechanism? Sure, I could, **but I know better**. Could I explain away this and many other experiences as a neurological quirk? What an **empty, foolish explanation**.

Spiritual truth requires both the heart (feeling) and the head (rational thought). I know faithful members whose experiences are primarily one or the other. Some have never had the burning in the bosom experience but understand the vast evidence of the restoration's truth claims and see the fruits of the Church. Others feel the Holy Ghost everywhere they go but know nothing about early church history. Both of these kinds of experiences are totally valid. I believe that **God does not withhold light and truth** because a truth seeker is more heart or head.

I am convinced that **God meets us where we are**. Whether that is through a burning bush for communication, washing seven times in the river Jordan for cleanliness, seer stones for revelation, or spit and clay in the eyes for sight.

For My Christian Brothers and Sisters

- If I believe in God, why wouldn't He manifest himself to me through the Holy Ghost?
- **Do I need to be a scripture scholar, historian, theologian, divinity student, pastor, and apologist to access God's truth?** Can anyone understand biblical truths even without the help of a favorite pastor or preacher? Why are some pastors and preachers right and others wrong?
- Does God withhold himself and the truth from those who do not have the education to find Him and it?
- When I worked long hours providing for my family, **did God withhold truth from me because I did not have a degree in religious studies?** Did my wife, the mother of my children, **not have access to God while she operated on little sleep caring for a crying infant?** Does God not speak to us because we have not studied early Christian history?

If God cannot speak to us through the Holy Ghost, how do I account for these bible verses?

- [John 10:27](#)- "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me."
- [Jeremiah 33:3](#) - "Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not."
- [Job 33:14](#) - "For God speaketh once, yea twice, yet man perceiveth it not."
- [John 16:12-13](#) - "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, **the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth**: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come." (emphasis added)
- [John 14:16-18](#) - "And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive,

because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you. I will not leave you comfortless: **I will come to you.**" (emphasis added)

- [John 14:26](#) – "But the Comforter, which is **the Holy Ghost**, whom the Father will send in my name, he **shall teach you all things**, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you." (emphasis added)
- [1 John 5:14-15](#) – "And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him."
- [Romans 8:14](#) – "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God."
- [Revelation 3:20](#) – "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me."
- [Mark 11:24](#) – "Therefore I say unto you, **What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them.**" (emphasis added)
- [James 1:5](#) – "**If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God**, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him." (emphasis added)

In [2 Corinthians 11:14-15](#) it says, "For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light." Earlier in the New Testament, Christ gave this warning, "Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves." ([Matthew 7:15](#))

These are fair points when talking about receiving a spiritual witness regarding the Book of Mormon and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. However, doesn't **Christ give us the remedy** for this problem later in [Matthew 7](#)?

"Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their **fruits** ye shall know them." ([Matthew 7:16-20](#), emphasis added)

→ How does a Christian critic account for the fruits of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints? Or for the fruits of the Book of Mormon?

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints does not gatekeep truth or claim to have all of it. It appears to me that we are among the most open religious groups to various forms of truth, regardless of where it comes from. Is that why the members of the Church are comfortable with someone from another church receiving spiritual experiences or a spiritual witness?

→ Who are we to limit God?

Testimony and Spiritual Witnesses Conclusion

When church leaders and missionaries invite people to ask God, they **invite them to clear every distraction, be alone, and pray**. The truth seeker is left to themselves to ask God. There is **no persuasive influence** from a missionary, **no threat** from an authority figure, **no large crowds** to excite the senses, and **no substances** to introduce a drug-fueled awakening. It is simply the individual and God. How in the world does this method work at all? How have millions of people taken this challenge for 200 years and received an answer?

In [Jacob 7:11-12](#) Jacob teaches that he learned spiritual truths about Christ through a study of the scriptures, his experiences, logic, and the Holy Ghost. I suspect the same is true for me. Admittedly, **my personal experiences are not conclusive evidence for why another person should believe**. It would be like witnessing the breaking of a world record without an adjudicator or video evidence. **I know it, but I cannot prove it**. And that's okay. It appears to me that God wants everyone to have their own witness of his light and truth.

→ **Religious experience is not proof, but it is valid.** If I've experienced God and the gospel bears fruit, what more proof do I need?

Prophets and Ongoing Revelation

Questions & Concerns

“The church doesn’t care about families. It cares about getting people married with kids as quickly as possible so it can lock them in as tithe-paying baby factories to perpetuate the church’s existence.” – X (Twitter) user

“What does this say about a church that claims to be restored and led by modern revelation?”⁴⁰⁷ – CES Letter

Many critics of the Church of Jesus Christ **start their claims from the false premise that our leaders are infallible**. They never say it in those words, but it is heavily implied in their criticisms. They do this by using a modern lens to reinterpret the past. In the critics' defense, many members of the Church falsely believe that church leaders can make personal mistakes but cannot make theological mistakes. Often, critics display potentially questionable quotes or policies from the past to elicit cognitive dissonance. **Eventually, those tricks stopped working on me**. I realized that if I agree with the critics that church leaders are infallible (a false assumption) and then the critic shows me their errors, I am susceptible to leaving the Church.

→ Where can I find the teaching of leadership infallibility anywhere in the Church?

"And, to be perfectly frank, there have been times when members or **leaders in the Church have simply made mistakes**. There may have been things said or done that were not in harmony with our values, principles, or doctrine. I suppose the Church would be perfect only if it were run by perfect beings. God is perfect, and His doctrine is pure. But He works through us—His imperfect children—and imperfect people make mistakes." – Dieter Uchtdorf (October 2013 General Conference, [Come, Join with Us](#), emphasis added)

"And behold, how oft you have transgressed the commandments and the laws of God, and have gone on in the persuasions of men. For, behold, you should not have feared man more than God. Although men set at naught the counsels of God, and despise his words-- Yet you should have been faithful; and he would have extended his arm and supported you against all the fiery darts of the adversary; and he would have been with you in every time of trouble. **Behold, thou art Joseph, and thou wast chosen to do the work of the Lord, but because of transgression, if thou art not aware thou wilt fall.**" (emphasis added) – [Doctrine and Covenants 3:6-9](#)

"Now, was not Joseph Smith a mortal man? Yes. A fallible man? Yes. Had he not weaknesses? Yes, he acknowledged them himself, and did not fail to put the revelations on record in this book [the Book of Doctrine and Covenants] wherein God reproved him. **His weaknesses were not concealed from the people**. He was willing that people should know that he was mortal, and had failings. And so with Brigham Young. Was not he a mortal man, a man who had weaknesses? He was not a God. He was not an immortal being. **He was not infallible**. No, he was fallible."⁴⁰⁸ (Emphasis added) – George G. Cannon

Until June 1978, the Church banned black members of African descent from holding the priesthood and participating in temple ordinances.⁴⁰⁹ Two months after the restriction was lifted, apostle Bruce R. McConkie said the following:⁴¹⁰

"There are statements in our literature by the early Brethren which we have interpreted to mean that the [people of African descent] would not receive the priesthood in mortality. I have said the same things... **Forget everything that I have said**, or what President Brigham Young or President George Q. Cannon or whomsoever has said in days past that is contrary to the present revelation. **We spoke with a limited understanding** and without the light and knowledge that now has come into the world.

We get our truth and our light line upon line and precept upon precept. We have now had added a new flood of intelligence and light on this particular subject, and it erases all the darkness and all the views and all the thoughts of the past. They don't matter any more.

It doesn't make a particle of difference what anybody ever said about the [racial ban] matter before the first day of June of this year, 1978. It is a new day and a new arrangement." (emphasis added)

On the title page of the Book of Mormon, the keystone of our religion, it says:

"And now, if there are faults they are the mistakes of men; wherefore, condemn not the things of God, that ye may be found spotless at the judgment seat of Christ." – [Title page, Book of Mormon](#)

→ Isn't the statement above from the Book of Mormon teaching a scary yet beautiful doctrine? **God calls flawed instruments who make mistakes to do His work.** Doesn't that give me hope that while I flounder, I can be a part of the building up the kingdom of God?

→ Doesn't the **mortal weakness of mankind** make the restoration of Christ's church and gospel all the **more impressive**?

With some exceptions, can't we agree that our flawed leaders have done a good job leading church members to God? Blessing the lives of the individuals and the communities where members reside?

Christ was perfect, unlike our leaders. However, he gave what seemed like a strange lesson after feeding thousands for the second time. He said, "Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day." ([John 6:54](#))

"From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him." ([John 6:66](#))

How did Simon Peter and the disciples react to this unusual object lesson that was superficially contrary to religious norms?

"Simon Peter answered him, Lord, **to whom shall we go?** thou hast the words of eternal life. And **we believe and are sure** that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God." ([John 6:68-69, emphasis added](#))

→ If this is Christ's Church and the apostles and prophets are his chosen mortal leaders, then **where else shall I go?**

→ Is there another organization that has **more light and truth**? A group that does more good? I am perfectly open to that possibility. If yes, then where is it? How do I join?

Many critics seem to misconstrue **what it takes to be a leader in the Church.** I am sympathetic to that sentiment because that was me. In high school, I had a bishop with whom I was at odds. To my embarrassment, I was critical of him until I was 29. Anytime I referred to him, it was in a negative way.

What happened? In 2016, I was sitting in a ward council, and out of nowhere, I was caught away in a vision of the past. My attention flashed back to 2004, and I could see a small council in my mind's eye, like the one I was then sitting in. The bishop I was so critical of prayed. He prayed for me and my family by name. Tears streamed down my face as I **realized my hypocrisy.** That bishop was, in a way, me. I realized that he and I, and millions

of other typical members, **are the leaders of the Church**. The general authorities of the Church are likewise **a bunch of flawed people who are flailing their way toward light and truth**.

"A Ridiculous and Inconsistent 187-year Track Record"

Jeremy Runnels states in the *CES Letter*:

*"Why would I want my kids chanting '**Follow the Prophet**' with such a ridiculous and inconsistent 187-year track record? What credibility do the **Brethren** have? Why would I want them following the **prophet** when a **prophet** is just a man of his time teaching his 'theories' that will likely be disavowed by future '**Prophets, Seers, and Revelators**'? If his moral blueprint is not much better than that of their **Sunday School teachers**? If, historically speaking, the **doctrine** he teaches today will likely be tomorrow's false **doctrine**?"⁴¹¹ (Emphasis added)*

I see what Jeremy is trying to do, but what if I used **the same logic to judge the scientific method and scientific consensus** at large?⁴¹² I was taught in grade school that Pluto is a planet, **wrong**. It's a dwarf planet. It was once believed that the universe was our solar system, but that is **incorrect**. Conventional wisdom used to be that the earth was the center of the universe, also **wrong**. The Blank Slate theory, **incorrect**. A static universe proposed by Einstein, **not true**. Spontaneous generation by Aristotle? **Supplanted** by germ theory. Maternal impression, **also wrong**. Aristotelian physics **superseded** by Newtonian physics. The Hollow Earth theory? **Nope**. Phrenology? That is **not true** either.

Using Jeremy's same logic, scientific skeptic "Mr. Crunnels" could have easily written the following paragraph:

*"Why would I want my kids chanting '**Use the Scientific Method**' with such a ridiculous and inconsistent 187-year track record? What credibility do **scientists and scholars** have? Why would I want them following the **scientific consensus** when **scientists, academics, and scholars** are just a product of their time teaching their '**theories**' that will likely be disavowed by future '**scientists, academics, and scholars**'? If their **scientific** blueprint is not much better than that of **non-academics**? If, historically speaking, **the scientific consensus** they teach today will likely be tomorrow's false **theories**?"*

Science and academia are meaningful endeavors regardless of what "Mr. Crunnels" may say. Even with the blunders, **continuing to use the scientific method is worthwhile as we stumble toward light and truth**. I understand that those honestly striving will not get everything right. Trusting scientists and prophets bears some peril, but the consequences of abandoning them altogether appear far worse.

Critics have a field day with the much-maligned statement from Wilford Woodruff, "*The Lord will never permit me or any other man who stands as President of this Church to lead you astray.*"⁴¹³ Usually, the criticism is followed up with "what about" statements regarding the African priesthood ban or polygamy.

BYU professor Anthony Sweat, in an online video, gave this great illustration [highlighting the difference between mistakes and leading astray](#). (punctuation added, emphasis added)⁴¹⁴

“My wife and I ... have seven children, and therefore, we have made a lot of mistakes, and I’ll be the first to admit that. If I brought in my seven children onto this video one by one and lined them up and said tell all the viewers of this video how many times your mother and father have made mistakes, this video would go on for hours and hours. I’m positive I’ve had to repent, I’ve had to learn, I’ve had to apologize, I’ve had to grow. However, I’m confident that if we brought in those same seven children and said, ‘**Do your Mom and Dad lead your family astray?**’ I’m confident that all seven of my children would say no. They lead us on the right path; **they lead us in the right direction.**”

- So, the critic asks, “Follow a prophet, even though he may be wrong sometimes?” My answer? Yes. That’s exactly what I’m saying. The risk is worth it, just like it’s worth the risk of continuing the scientific method. **Learning to cope with leaders and heroes who make mistakes is part of growing up.** In my 20’s, I naively thought that I had lousy parents. Then I became a dad. I have earned some gray hairs. I now clearly see my parents for who they were - Flawed people who loved their children and tried their best.
- **The Church is our best vehicle for receiving modern revelation and for helping people.** Flawless? No. I’m fine with the presence of flaws “in the vehicle.” **When critics identify some defect in the vehicle, what do they want me to do, run it off a cliff?** Run it off a cliff with me and my family trapped inside? No thanks. The Church and its leaders reliably point the saints to **the true hero, Jesus Christ**. If there is a God, and He has called a prophet on earth today, then yes, my children and I will sing with gusto, “Follow the Prophet.”

“The Church Does Not Tell the Truth”

I watched nearly every baseball game during the historic 2000 and 2001 Seattle Mariners baseball seasons. I easily spent over 300 hours watching baseball during those two years. In all those months and hours of watching baseball, I do not recall hearing the commentators discussing the **history of scandals in the MLB**. I did not hear about gambling scandals, bribes, conspiracies, salary collusions, substance abuse, steroid usage, sign stealing scandals, and racism. Perhaps I heard of some of these issues in passing but never got an in-depth history lesson about baseball’s questionable past. Ultimately, I am glad I did not. I was, after all, **a kid in Junior High who wanted to watch some baseball.**

At one point, critics of the Church convinced me that Church leaders knew that the truth claims of the restoration were false. **I’m embarrassed to say this now**, but at one point, I had so bought into the *CES Letter* narrative that I said out loud to my wife, **“Do you think**

the Church leaders keep going with the lie because of how much good the Church does? Is that how they justify their existence?"

Once I finished my **ignorant skepticism phase**, I started seeing things as they really were. From the fall 2019 – spring 2021, I taught early morning seminary. We covered the last part of the New Testament, the Book of Mormon, and the first half of the Doctrine and Covenants. When I was called to teach seminary, I was excited to inoculate my students against the critics' complaints that "no one taught me XYZ in Church." I did my best to cover polygamy, seer stones, controversial policies, etc. Over time, I realized something: My students did not need or care for those topics. They **needed to hear that God loves them**, that they can **be forgiven of their sins**, that they are each a **precious son or daughter of God**, and that **Christ's atonement can enable us** to do great things. In other words, they needed to hear everything the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints emphasizes.

It occurred to me that most participants (myself included) in seminary, Sunday school, young women, young men, priesthood quorums, relief society, and sacrament meetings **need the gospel of Jesus Christ**. I need to regularly hear the importance of daily scripture study, prayer, church attendance, repentance, faith, temple worship, family history, etc. I realized that the Church and its leaders are likely not overtly hiding anything. Instead, they were choosing to do what mattered: **To focus on what I would be focused on if I were in their shoes and running a global church.**

If there is someone out there like me who wants to learn more, there are plenty of resources.

I have also come to appreciate something else that the Church of Jesus Christ does. There is an **ever-increasing amount of positive evidence** for the Church's truth claims, **yet the Church does not focus on them**. The **Church's leaders are impressively committed to the gospel of Jesus Christ**, even if some concept or theory seriously bolsters our claims.

Critics appear perfectly willing to float any potential theory (even if it contradicts another theory of theirs) **as absolute fact**. It is clear to me that critics are interested in some ideas only to the extent that those ideas support their real goal: trying to convince people to resign their membership in the Church. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is focused on a different kind of work. When additional supportive evidence emerges, the Church has demonstrated discipline and reservation in taking victory laps. **That is a sign of church leaders who are confident in the direction and focus of the Church.**

Church Finances

Questions & Concerns

“This all to say, the church has plenty of funds today. They do not need to ask for a single dollar from the membership. They could fund the church in perpetuity with the interest alone in this ‘rainy day fund.’ Then the church also has many more funds available to them and the for-profit businesses they run. If there is ever a day when the church doesn’t need the constant income from tithing funds, that is today.”⁴¹⁵ – Article on Was Mormon

Recently, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has received increased criticism of its finances. I'll admit that when I learned that the Church's investment portfolio may exceed \$100 Billion, I was unsure how to feel.

Then I learned more. The Church has been **near bankruptcy about every 20 to 30 years** between 1830 and **the 1960s**. The saints, led by Joseph Smith, poured everything they had into the Kirtland temple and then left it. The saints were driven out of their homes in Missouri, suffering significant losses. They built up Nauvoo and finished the temple, only to leave that behind. Brigham Young led the destitute saints to settle a nearly uninhabitable land in the Rocky Mountains. In Utah, the Saints faced continued pressure from the United States government. **The Church has endured every financial crash, depression, and major economic downturn in the last 200 years while still providing essential religious services and growing internationally.**

- **Where were the critics** when the saints **lost their homes and land in Missouri**? Where were the sympathetic detractors when members of the Church had to sell their homes and land at huge losses in Ohio, Missouri, and Illinois? Did the dissenters ease up and back down?
- **Did the critics cheer on the Latter-day Saints when they were on the brink of financial failure?** Did the critics cut the saints some slack because of their dire economic situation during most of the Church's history?

Reeling from the Great Depression, the Church was very cautious about its use of the tithing funds of the members of the Church.⁴¹⁶ Everything saved was kept in cash. It all came to a head in 1963 when an initiative to build facilities around the world in the late 1950s forced the Church to spend all of its reserves. **The Church was \$236 million in debt by 1963.** There were some concerns that the **Church could not make payroll** for the paid employees of the Church Office buildings in Salt Lake City. A sharp businessman, N. Eldon Tanner, introduced policies and procedures in the Church at that time to put it on a better financial footing. That included using sophisticated wealth management techniques used by other institutions. And it worked. **The Church paid its debts in a few short years and started getting into the black.** Only in the last two or three decades has the Church gone from stable to incredibly successful.

Do the critics not realize that the Church's financial success is a recent phenomenon?

- **Isn't the turnaround of the Church's finances miraculous?** Wonderful? Can't the Church do so much more good now that it is on a stable financial footing?
- Critics complain that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints still requires 10 percent tithing on members' "increase" even though the Church is much more financially stable. Until recently, haven't church members contributed additional funds and money above and beyond tithing to construct local church buildings and temples?
- Isn't it safe to say that the Church requires less of us now than ever?
 - Is requiring "less of us" good for our spiritual development? Does making things easier and more convenient make more devoted, committed members of the Church? (I personally do not think so.)

Isn't tithing a principle of faith? If there is a God, and tithing is his law, what does it matter how well off the Church is?

The Welfare Program of the Church

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints cares for the needy in long-lasting and meaningful ways.

In 2023 alone⁴¹⁷, there was/were:

- **\$1.3 billion in expenditures** for welfare, self-reliance, humanitarian aid, and volunteer service in 191 countries and territories
- 6.2 million **hours volunteered**
- 11,368 **welfare and self-reliance missionaries**
- 4,119 **humanitarian projects**
- 206 **clean water, hygiene, and sanitation projects**
- 530 **education projects**
- 415 emergency relief projects
- 5,538 **job placements** through Employment Services
- 601 **healthcare projects**
- 530 **food security projects**
- 374 **housing projects** serving the homeless
- 2,926 **addiction recovery, support, and therapeutic groups** that meet weekly
- 14,643 **self-reliance groups** serving 110,019 participants

Socioeconomic Status of Members of the Church

Sociologist Tim Heaton reports in *Vital Statistics*⁴¹⁸ on the subject of "Latter-day Saint Social Life" that members of the Church have above-average socioeconomic attainment. This likely includes both the US and non-US countries.

Education generally has an inverse relationship or no relationship with religious devotion. Latter-day Saint members, however, are **more religious** the more educated they are. The *Pew Research Center*⁴¹⁹ reports:

"Among Mormons, those who are more highly educated are not simply as religious as those with less education – **Mormons with college experience are more religiously observant**, on average, than Mormons with less education. Fully 92% of college-educated Mormons are highly religious, as are 91% of Mormons with some college. Among Mormons whose

education topped out with high school, however, just 78% score high on the index of religious observance.” (emphasis added)

→ Why are more devoted members of the Church more likely to be educated?

In the same [religious landscape study from the Pew Research Center](#)⁴²⁰, a higher percentage of Latter-day Saints were in the “\$50,000-\$99,000” and “\$100,000+” income categories, and a lower percentage of Latter-day Saints were in the “\$30,000-\$49,999” and “less than \$30,000” categories.⁴²¹

→ **Why do members of the Church make more money than non-religious people do?**

Non-Latter-day Saint economist and George Mason University professor Tyler Cowen provides commentary on how [religious moral codes may help strengthen the middle class and alleviate poverty](#).⁴²² Regarding the Latter-day Saints, he said:

“Religions and social movements with strong moral codes may be able to help improve life prospects. It is striking, for example, that Utah fits the economic profile of an older, more middle-class-oriented America. The reasons for this are complex, but they may stem in part from the large number of Mormons in the state.

Mormons have done relatively well in economic terms, perhaps, at least in part, because their **religious culture encourages behavior consistent with prosperity**, such as savings, mutual assistance, family values and no drug and alcohol abuse.

I am not a Mormon and am not advocating that religion or any other. But it seems reasonable to observe that **changing social norms, sometimes associated with religion, can help improve living standards.**” (emphasis added)

In my observation, members of the Church of Jesus Christ have an impressive sense of **self-determination** and **agency**. That is no surprise with scripture like this one:

“Verily I say, men should be **anxiously engaged in a good cause**, and do many things of **their own free will**, and bring to pass much righteousness; **For the power is in them**, wherein they are **agents unto themselves**. And inasmuch as men do good they shall in nowise lose their reward. But he that doeth not anything until he is commanded, and receiveth a commandment with doubtful heart, and keepeth it with slothfulness, the same is damned.” – [Doctrine and Covenants 58: 27-29](#) (emphasis added)

Contrast the Latter-day Saint doctrine above to the doctrine of determinism espoused by many of the Church's skeptics and of the culture at large.

“All events, including human action, are ultimately determined by causes external to the will. Some philosophers have taken determinism to imply that individual human beings have no free will and cannot be held morally responsible for their actions.”⁴²³ – Oxford language definition of “Determinism” (emphasis added)

Ironically, **critics of the Church are deterministic unless determinism reflects positively on the Church**. At that point, they say that the Church has no effect as a cause external to the will.

“Well, of course, I’d have self-control and discipline if I did not grow up in the Church.”

“Of course, I’d have this beautiful family that I love even without the Church.”

“No, I would not be addicted to drugs even if I was not raised in the Church.”

- How **naive** would I have to be to think that everything good in my life has nothing to do with the gospel of Jesus Christ? How **deluded and narcissistic** would I have to be to enjoy the fruits of my religious upbringing and then turn around to curse the tree?

Unpaid Clergy

99%+ of the Church's leaders are unpaid. There are over **35,000 congregations** with a Bishop or Branch president, **unpaid**. There are over **3,500 stakes** with a stake president, **unpaid**. There are over **400 missions** with a mission president, **unpaid**. There are over **175 temples** with a temple president, **unpaid**. Plus, the **thousands** of bishopric members, mission presidency members, stake presidency members, temple presidency members, elder's quorum, and relief society presidents and presidency members of the world are all **unpaid**. **Millions of other members** serve in callings or on missions, **unpaid**. There are a little over 100 full-time paid clergy in our Church (15 apostles and 100 or so others).⁴²⁴

Isn't it safe to say that the Church essentially has an unpaid clergy?

The 100 or so Church leaders who receive compensation receive a modest salary.⁴²⁵ Some other leaders, like mission presidents, can opt to receive a stipend for living expenses.

- **Does anyone aspire to become a church leader for all that cash?**

I suspect no Church member in its history has sought to become a high-ranking leader because of all the money in it. The root problem with the criticism about unpaid clergy in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is that **we cannot seek to be a church leader; we are called to it**. There is no way to earn it or lobby for it. It is a calling.

- What do critics think? Church leaders **serve tirelessly for countless hours for years** in local wards and stakes, **hoping they'll get called** as a general authority so that finally, after decades of selfish service, they'll get that **sweet, sweet cash from a "modest salary"**? Really?
- Shouldn't the critics ask why we call (not volunteer) people in their **60's and 70's to work 6 days a week for long hours** for a "modest salary"? **Isn't that elder abuse?** Shouldn't they be making more? **Why aren't there more petitions from critics demanding that the general authorities have more days off?**

Church Finances Conclusion

I quickly discovered how much of the **criticism of the Church's modern wealth is disingenuous**. Critics would disapprove of something else if not for the Church's success. Critics of the Church have always beaten us while we were down and never let up. They ignore the substantial amount of long-lasting humanitarian and social aid the Church provides. Critics purposely try to disconnect the better-than-average socioeconomic status of members of the Church of Jesus Christ from its doctrines and practices.

It's easy to only see dollar signs. I've come to see the widow's mite of millions of faithful Latter-day Saints across generations to build up the Kingdom of God on the earth. I see **honest and good stewards** of that money making the most of those sacred funds. Most importantly, I see how temperance and sacrifice have blessed the lives of countless members of the Church, including my own.

Abuse in the Church

Questions & Concerns

“The LDS church should explode into a million little blue post it notes and all of its assets should be given to the communities it has hurt the most, including, but not limited to, victims of sexual abuse, minorities, and queer people. And RMs, and anyone who didn’t actually want kids or to be married but didn’t realize until it was too late.” – X (Twitter) User

Accusations of abuse in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was one of the claims that felt most unlike my own personal experience. My intuition led me to believe that because of the practices and beliefs of the Church, it was likely safer to be a church member than not. Was I wrong? Abuse is a deeply personal problem, and so much abuse goes unreported. I ache for anyone who has suffered abuse by anyone.

So I had to ask myself, despite my personal experience in the Church, is the Church of Jesus Christ systematically abusive? Are my children more at risk of physical or sexual abuse because of their membership in the Church?

Am I more likely to commit acts of abuse as a member of the Church? **Is there something in our handbook, doctrine, rituals, or ordinances that inspires violence?**

Many critics of the Church would enthusiastically answer yes to all of the above. Are they right?

A nonprofit, *Stop Educator Sexual Abuse Misconduct & Exploitation*, states that in 2015, of **“3.5 million students between 8th and 11th grade – nearly 7 percent of those surveyed – divulged that they experienced ‘physical sexual contact from an adult’ (most often a teacher or a coach).”**⁴²⁶ (emphasis added) They report that **10% of children** surveyed (4.5 million) reported both physical and/or non-physical types of **sexual misconduct**.

Additionally, student-on-student sexual assault is seven times higher than adult-on-child sexual assault.⁴²⁷

Those are the reports from the schools, but instances of general **abuse at home are even more dire**. The *U.S. Department of Health & Human Services Administration for Children and Families Administration on Children, Youth and Families Children’s Bureau* reported that in 2020, at least **16.5% of children experienced physical abuse, and at least 9.4% were sexually abused**.⁴²⁸

One of the real challenges of abuse is reporting. Children and youth generally do not report instances of abuse or delay their reporting months or years later.

I hate to say this is the case, but any large organization will have some levels of abuse, and the Church of Jesus Christ is no exception. Does abuse happen in the Church more often than abuse happens at home or in our schools? Or in other churches?

Most importantly, when abuse happens in the Church of Jesus Christ, is it **because** of the practices, beliefs, and doctrines of the Church? Or do they happen in **spite** of those practices, beliefs, and doctrines? Am I or my family more likely to experience abuse because of our membership in the Church? Is abuse more likely in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints than membership in any other organization?

Jennifer Roach, a mental health therapist and a convert to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, addresses these questions in a FAIR conference speech titled [“Shedding Light on the Complexities: Understanding Abuse Within the LDS Church.”](#)⁴²⁹ Jennifer grew up in another faith and is a church abuse victim herself. She admits that abuse data is incredibly challenging to collect and analyze, but she did manage to find a data set that sheds light on abuse in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Historically, the Church has comprised 30% of the Boy Scouts of America until its separation from the Boy Scouts in 2018. She reviewed thousands of cases in the *Boy Scout Perversion Files* going back 80 years. The files contain abuse and perversion records in the Boy Scout

organization. In those reports, a line item identifies the affiliated group or church sponsoring the scout unit where the abuse happened. She found that **while the Church-sponsored around 30% of the Boy Scout troops, the number of abuse cases involving LDS troops was only 5.16% of the cases.** That's **75% less abuse** among Latter-day Saint troops.

Jennifer makes the poignant comment, "I mean, I know where I would put my kid."

→ **Why is abuse so much less likely** to occur among the Latter-day Saints?

The Church handbook contains several common-sense policies to avoid and prevent abuse, such as not riding alone with a child, two-deep leadership, classrooms with windows, and youth safety training. Additionally, Jennifer Roach suggests **seven unique practices** in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints that further **protect our children and youth**.⁴³⁰

1. **The Calling System**—The Church calls people to serve in various assignments. They do not volunteer.
2. **Being Sustained**—When someone is called to a new assignment, their name is presented to the congregation for a sustaining vote. If someone has concerns about a newly called leader over children and youth, they have an opportunity to raise those concerns.
3. **Existing Associations**—Wards and stakes are organized by geographic boundaries. A predator cannot go from church to church to find new victims.
4. **Member Number System**—The Church has a membership record and ID number for every member. This number follows every member, even in different countries.
5. **Gender-Specific Leaders for Young Women** – Men are more likely to abuse, and teenage girls are more likely to be victims of abuse than teenage boys. Direct adult leaders for girls are women.
6. **Withdrawal of Membership (Excommunication)** – If a member is caught abusing kids, they will be kicked out of the Church, and First Presidency approval is required for them to come back. This is not the case in other churches and organizations.
7. **The Helpline**—Lay church leaders around the world do not necessarily have the training and background necessary to handle cases of abuse. The Church has a hotline with trained experts who can provide information and support for the church leader and the victim.

Here is the unfortunate truth. **Most child victims are abused by a parent.** The National Children's Alliance reports in 2021 that **77% of substantiated child abuse cases** (sexual abuse, physical abuse, neglect, witness to violence, drug endangerment, and other) were **perpetrated by a parent of the victim**.⁴³¹ Another 13% are perpetrated by other relatives or an unmarried partner of a parent.

→ Regularly scheduled semi-annual interviews with each youth by the ward's or branch's presiding ecclesiastical leaders have received pushback in recent years. But **shouldn't children and youth have a trusted adult to talk to** if something is wrong at home? Or at school? How much abuse has been stopped or prevented through the Church's semi-annual interview program?

It is awful that any level of abuse exists in the world. To anyone who commits heinous acts of abuse of children, *"it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depths of the sea."* (Matthew 18:6). **The painful reality is that**

our children and youth are far more likely to experience abuse at home, at school, or even in other churches than they are to experience it in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. That does not mean that there is nothing to do and no more progress can be made to prevent abuse. With that said, our unique practices and procedures protect victims. Will there always be some instance where a local ward or stake volunteer leader did not do enough to protect the victims? Sadly, yes. However, any shortcoming among our members and leaders is in **spite of, not because of**, the Church and its teachings/practices.

The following are six statements from the Church's general handbook of instructions for church leaders regarding abuse among its church members ([Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saint General Handbook section 38.6.2.1](#)⁴³², numbers and emphasis added):

"Church leaders and members should follow these guidelines when responding to abuse:

- (1) When abuse occurs, **the first and immediate responsibility of Church leaders is to help those who have been abused and to protect vulnerable persons from future abuse.** Members should never be encouraged to remain in a home or situation that is abusive or unsafe.
- (2) **Church leaders and members should be caring, compassionate, and sensitive** when working with victims and perpetrators and their families.
- (3) **Church leaders should never disregard a report of abuse** or counsel a member not to report criminal activity to law enforcement personnel.
- (4) **Church leaders and members should fulfill all legal obligations** to report abuse to civil authorities.
- (5) Priesthood leaders should help those who have committed abuse to repent and cease their abusive behavior (see [Isaiah 1:18](#); [Doctrine and Covenants 64:7](#)).
- (6) **Professional counseling may be helpful for the victims** and perpetrators and their families. It is almost always advised in cases of serious abuse."

→ Do critics have a better system to prevent abuse? Does it work?

The folks who claim that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is systematically abusive are **not looking at the full picture**. Like many other condemnations, critics are **taking a strength** of the Church and **pretending it is a weakness**. The narrative and claim that there is more sexual abuse in the Church of Jesus Christ than in other churches is unsupported by the evidence. That is the case, no matter how desperate the critics are to believe otherwise. **I felt lied to by the critics** who wanted to convince me that abuse is widespread and rampant in the Church.

LGBTQ+ Issues

Questions & Concerns

“Utah is such a hostile place for the lgbtq+ community right now. If you’re in Utah and queer – sending you virtual hugs.” – X (Twitter) User

In my high school in the early 2000s, it was commonplace to refer to something bad in a way that is derogative to same-sex attracted individuals. To my embarrassment, like seemingly everyone else, I used the same language. I did not pick that up at church but at school. I was never personally hostile to **homosexual men or women. Still, partly** due to several unwanted sexual encounters by men in high school and on my mission in Peru, **I was undoubtedly avoidant.**

That all changed for me in Pucallpa, Peru. My missionary companion and I were teaching a less active family with some unbaptized members. The aging grandmother lived in the home as well. The less active members we focused on were incredibly neglectful and rude to the grandmother. It was shameful and despicable. The only one in that home that treated the grandmother with kindness and compassion was the gay uncle. Unlike his less active Latter-day Saint sister, he was sweet and honoring of his mother. That **one man humanized a group** that I had been evading. I was upset that I was teaching the gospel of Jesus Christ to his heterosexual and neglectful sister but avoiding him. I was called to repentance and reminded that the **gospel is for all of God’s children.**

In 2015, prominent church critic and podcast host John Dehlin published a dissertation through Utah State University titled “Sexual Orientation Change Efforts, Identity Conflict, and Psychosocial Health Amongst Same-Sex Attracted Mormons.” In his research, he concludes that sexual orientation change efforts (SOCE) by members and former members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints were “overwhelmingly reported to be either ineffective or damaging by participants.”⁴³³ He derived the study’s results from 1,612 individuals who responded to an online survey.

Are those who identify as LGBTQ+ more at risk among the Latter-day Saints? Do they experience worse outcomes due to their membership in the Church?

I’ve wondered for the last ten years how damaging the Church is to the mental health of our LGBTQ+ brothers and sisters. From the comments of critics like John Dehlin, it really seemed like we were doing more harm than good. However, I also had personal experiences where LGBTQ+-identifying members of the Church were greatly blessed by their membership. So, which is it?

In a 2016 paper, [Stephen Cranney reports on the mental and physical health among Utah Mormon LGBs and non-Mormon LGBs using a large population-based dataset](#). He reports, “In a surprising finding, **Mormon LGBs report better mental health than non-Mormon LGBs.**”⁴³⁴ (emphasis added)

→ Why are LGBs' mental health better off as members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints?

Why was this finding so “surprising”?

“Surprising” LGBTQ+ Findings

The “surprising” finding listed above is increasingly less surprising.

In the **2023 report**, a **large representative sample** (n=73,982) of Utah middle schoolers and high schoolers found that LGBTQ-identifying youth in Utah were at a much higher risk of suicidal thoughts and behaviors than heterosexual youth. However, [Latter-day Saint LGBTQ-identifying youth reported lower rates of suicidal thoughts and behaviors than non-latter-day Saint LGBTQ-identifying youth.](#)⁴³⁵

Dyer and Goodman report in a 2022 paper that [Latter-day Saint LGBQ teens had lower levels of suicidality and depression than LGBQ teens of other religions or no religion.](#)⁴³⁶

In a 2021 paper, Lefevor, Davis, Paiz, and Smack report on the relationship between religiousness and health among sexual minorities. They found that [religiousness/spirituality is consistently and positively associated with better health](#). When isolating sexual minorities, the positive correlation between religiousness/spirituality and health still exists, though admittedly less so than the overall participants in their study.⁴³⁷

In a 2020 study in 11 Muslim countries, researchers found that [“Religiosity deters suicide through its effects on attitudes towards suicide.”](#)⁴³⁸ (emphasis added)

In an older 2002 study before the recent decade's meteoric rise in LGBTQ+ identification (my observation), Hilton, Fellingham, and Lyon found that "**higher levels of religiosity appear to be inversely associated with suicide.**"⁴³⁹ (emphasis added)

- Harvard researchers calculated in a 2017 study that nearly 40% of the recent increase in the U.S. suicide rate can be attributed to the decline in religious attendance.⁴⁴⁰

Goodman and Dyer, in a 2019 Deseret News article, share the following from their study:

- 44% of Utah's Latter-day Saint LGBTQ+-identify youths had seriously considered suicide compared to 47% of Utah's LGBTQ+-identifying youths from other religions and 77% of Utah's Atheist/Agnostic LGBTQ+-identifying youths. The national rate for LBG youth is 47.7%.⁴⁴¹
- The CDC found that from 2011 through 2015, **Latter-day Saint youths had a lower risk of suicide.**⁴⁴²

Walter Schumm reports that the "2019 Utah Prevention Needs Assessment Survey" suggests that **Latter-day Saint LGBQ youth had lower levels of reported depression and suicidality than nonreligious LGBQ youths.**⁴⁴³

- Schumm shares data from *Utah's Student Health and Risk Prevention (SHARP) Statewide Survey*. He states that "**Latter-day Saint students** generally were **less likely to have considered suicide** or attempted suicide, **be depressed, use drugs**, come from a drug-using family, **or be bullied for their sexual orientation**; they were **more likely** to come from a home with **stable parents**, more likely to **feel safe at school**, and **more likely to have been bullied on account of their religion.**"⁴⁴⁴ (emphasis added)
- Schumm shares the results of a BYU study and a Bowling Green study and concludes that these studies suggest that "**being a Latter-day Saint is protective against depression and suicidality, even for LGBTQ students.**"⁴⁴⁵ (emphasis added)

Tyler Lefevor, an associate professor of clinical/counseling specialization at Utah State University, was the lead researcher for a study published in [May of 2023 regarding sexuality minority Mormons.](#)⁴⁴⁶ Lefevor, a former latter-day Saint, admitted [that he was surprised by the findings.](#) He said:

*"I always think that as people become less religious, they're going to be happier. That's just what I expect to see every single time. And I shouldn't expect that anymore because it's been several years that I've been **not finding that.**"*⁴⁴⁷ (emphasis added)

In this study, Lefevor found that sexual minority Latter-day Saints become less religious over time and that **as people become less religious, they report less meaning in life and more depression.**⁴⁴⁸ He suspects that religiousness promotes purpose, meaning, a sense of structure, and more social support and connection.⁴⁴⁹

→ It appears that the risk of suicidal thoughts is [nearly double for those of no religion versus Latter-day Saints for both LGBQ-identifying and heterosexual students in Utah.](#)⁴⁵⁰ Might that mean the Church of Jesus Christ may be protective somehow? Why is the risk of suicidal ideation lower for Latter-day Saint youth in Utah if they are also more likely to be bullied for their religious affiliation, according to the 2019 SHARP survey?

What if I had bought into the critics' narratives? Now, knowing that the evidence contradicts their stereotypes?

- How do the critics, in good conscience, make blanket recommendations to LGBTQ+-identifying individuals to leave the Church and their families if the likelihood for worse outcomes is higher if they do that?

Admittedly, **the relationship between LGBTQ+-identifying Latter-day Saints and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is complicated**. More research needs to be done. As a church, I hope we can be welcoming and compassionate toward those struggling. In the meantime, it does seem that the Church is doing a better job for LGBTQ+-identifying members than critics give us credit for.

Dangerous Precedent

“What really matters is [that] LGBT Mormons continue to die by suicide. Mormon mixed-faith marriages continue to face intensive distress and sometimes divorce and the destruction of entire family where children get alienated from their parents. Families get torn apart as some lose their faith.”⁴⁵¹ (punctuation added) –

JOHN DEHLIN

Going back to the limited **2015 John Dehlin dissertation** referenced earlier, this highly popular and oft-cited study from John likely suffers from both **confirmation bias** (uniformity amongst researchers who lead with a conclusion in mind) and **sampling bias** (a volunteer online survey being circulated amongst disenfranchised members and former members of the Church). John’s snowball sampling⁴⁵² method makes the conclusions of his study highly suspect. [Jacob Hess provides a thoughtful critique of John Dehlin’s study.](#)⁴⁵³

- Why does the narrative in John Dehlin’s dissertation contradict the majority of the other scholarly research on sexual minorities in the Church?

Before 2015, was John Dehlin considered a neutral party to LGBTQ+ issues and the Church? How much ideological uniformity is there between John and his research team? Did his findings surprise him?

- Are the findings from a volunteer online survey that was disseminated from John’s *Mormon Stories* brand **reliable**? Isn’t that brand critical of the Church? Doesn’t the Mormon following of that brand consist mostly of disenfranchised former and current members of the Church? Doesn’t that meet the criteria for **sampling and selection bias**?

My biggest concern with John Dehlin is how heavy-handed he can be with the conclusions of his admittedly limited study. What if he is just wrong?

- Isn’t pressuring same-sex attracted individuals to step away from faith communities, marriages, family, and personal commitments a step in the wrong direction?

The problem for John and other critics is that most of the other reliable evidence regarding LGBTQ+-identified individuals and the Church comes to radically different conclusions than they do. That includes a Lefevor-led 2019 study that seemingly contradicts John’s findings. It says, “We found that **Mormons who reject an LGBQ identity** were significantly more

religious and less content with their sexuality but had **similar health outcomes relative to LBGQ Mormons.**"⁴⁵⁴ Said differently, LBGQ-identifying members of the Church who reject the LBGQ label had similar health outcomes as members of the Church who identify as LBGQ.

I believe that John truly cares about people who identify as LGBTQ+, and I give him credit for that. In his 2013 TEDX talk, "The Ally Within,"⁴⁵⁵ he discusses how members of the Church can support our LGBTQ+ brothers and sisters, and it seems to come from the heart. However, I'm concerned that his podcast and opinions create **worse outcomes** for the hundreds or thousands of Latter-day Saints he is professing to help by persuading them to leave the Church. I especially worry about our LGBTQ+-identifying brothers and sisters who listen to his podcast.

→ If John was objectively looking at the collective research, wouldn't he be justified in convincing sexual minorities to stay in the Church and be more religious?

I hope John can be more measured in his statements and recommendations to LGBTQ+-identifying individuals.

LGBTQ+ Concluding Thoughts

Unfortunately, data from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention shows that LBGQ individuals have higher rates of suicidality in every city and state in the country.⁴⁵⁶

Regarding sexual orientation, as the [Church Handbook](#) says: "The Church encourages families and members to reach out with sensitivity, love, and respect to persons who are attracted to others of the same sex. **The Church also promotes** understanding in society at large that reflects its teachings about **kindness, inclusiveness, love for others, and respect for all human beings.**"⁴⁵⁷ (emphasis added)

Regarding transgenderism, [the Handbook](#) says: "Transgender individuals face complex challenges. Members and nonmembers who identify as transgender — and their family and friends — **should be treated with sensitivity, kindness, compassion, and an abundance of Christlike love.** All are welcome to attend sacrament meeting, other Sunday meetings, and social events of the Church."⁴⁵⁸ (emphasis added)

The Church teaches that each soul's value is infinite in God's sight. In 2007, I learned that lesson myself. I'm sorry it took me that long. Since then, I have been blessed for my association with our LGBTQ+-identifying brothers and sisters in and out of the Church.

Plural Marriage

Questions & Concerns

“Nothing that the Mormon church has ever taught about polygamy to us, as members, was factually true. It was a disgusting, abusive system which no loving God would ever condone (let alone command). It’s immoral, sexist, and deeply troubling. We have been deceived.” – Reddit User⁴⁵⁹

“I’m neverMo. We all realize that modern day, mainstream Mormons don’t practice polygamy. But we know the church was founded on it and that Joe made it all up so that he could sleep around. If we know anything much about the religion, we know it’s expected after death. So yeah, there’s no escaping that polygamy is foundational to the church and it introduces a big ICK into a church that otherwise presents itself as wholesome.” – Reddit User⁴⁶⁰

Joseph Smith's polygamy in Kirtland and Nauvoo totally puzzled me when I debated leaving the Church of Jesus Christ. When I listened to critics, they emphasized a very simple narrative about polygamy in the early church. Namely, that Joseph and other church leaders were manipulative, sex-crazed scoundrels. To incite a reaction from me, critics compared Joseph to the leader of the fundamentalist LDS movement, Warren Jeffs. Taking advantage of the few details that survived that era, critics seemed contented with flashing headlines about Joseph marrying other men's wives and teenagers as young as 14 years old.

As I did more research, the **critical narrative about polygamy just didn't fit**. If Joseph and other church leaders were only doing what they did for power and sex, much of their behavior makes no sense. That narrative only left me with more questions.

- If Joseph only wanted sex, why were his likely first two polygamist wives in Nauvoo married women who were 7 months pregnant?⁴⁶¹ Didn't the medical advice of the day advise against sex during pregnancy, warning that it could be harmful to the unborn child?⁴⁶²
- If Joseph was married and then having sex with other men's wives, why were **no complaints filed against the prophet** from the men whose wives he was sealed to?⁴⁶³

How come none of the married women and their husbands ever claim that Joseph participated in polyandry?⁴⁶⁴

There is no evidence that the saints (and Joseph) participated in polyandry.⁴⁶⁵ So what are the sealings to married women about?

If Joseph was having lots of sex with lots of women, why were there **no children born to Joseph from one of his plural wives** despite him clearly being fertile?⁴⁶⁶ (He had 9 children with Emma, even with long periods of time apart and challenging schedules).

That isn't to say that Joseph had no sexual relations with any of his wives, but clearly, the narrative that it was all about sex is weak. If not for sex, then what is the **motive for the sealing practices** in Nauvoo and Kirtland?

The Law of Adoption, Dynasty Sealings, Eternity Only Sealings

Joseph Smith was passionate about creating an unbroken chain of families bound together and sealed up to God. This seems to be the **driving force** behind his actions in Kirtland and Nauvoo. Parley Pratt reports that in 1839 Joseph was teaching the apostles about the sealing power and the eternal family organization.⁴⁶⁷ Surprisingly, sealings were not performed for deceased relatives until 1894.⁴⁶⁸ Up to that point, members participated in sealings to other living members of the Church in what is called the "**law of adoption**" or "**dynastic sealings**."⁴⁶⁹ Without the ability (or practice) of being sealed to one's deceased ancestors, early saints sought to be sealed and linked to someone, commonly a church leader. For a time, there was the practice of sealing married women to other men, families

to other families, siblings to other siblings, and even men to other men. **“Eternity only”** sealings is a term coined by historians to describe marriages of an already married woman whose husband was not a member of the Church.⁴⁷⁰ There is no indication that “eternity only” sealings had any of the standard marital expectations of other traditional marriages or standard plural marriages. **Thus, a “marriage” or a “sealing” did not necessarily imply a sexual or marital relationship.**⁴⁷¹

It is worth noting that the Saints’ understanding of adoption in Brigham Young’s day contributed to the **solidarity and interdependence** that helped them cross the plains to Utah. In other words, the **Saints’ understanding of the “law of adoption” as a social order likely helped them survive.**⁴⁷² Further, I wonder how much benefit from the “law of adoption” we still reap today in our **“ward families.”**

In the spirit of ongoing revelation, Wilford Woodruff revealed that the Saints could perform proxy sealing work and seal themselves to their ancestors.⁴⁷³ This change ended the need for the “law of adoption” altogether in the late 19th century in favor of sealing children to their parents.

When I learned about the “law of adoption,” “dynasty sealings,” and “eternity only” sealings, the once **salacious headlines** regarding polygamy in the early church **lost its shock value.** For example, Joseph Smith’s youngest polygamist wife was 14-year-old Helen Mar Kimball. Though marriage at 14 would have been more acceptable on the frontier in the 1840s, that is still fairly young. However, Helen reports that she was sealed to the prophet at the behest of her father, Heber C. Kimball, who had “a great desire to be connected with the prophet.”⁴⁷⁴ These details line up with what I’ve come to understand about the “law of adoption.” Further, there is very little evidence to support the claim that Joseph Smith had sexual relations with Helen.⁴⁷⁵

→ Why do critics harp on the headline-catching details of polygamy when the details are fairly limited, and what limited evidence we have points to the “law of adoption,” “dynastic sealings,” and “eternity only” sealings?

The Fruits of Plural Marriage

Critics attempt to frame plural marriage as some sort of sexual deviancy among Joseph Smith and other Church leaders. I’ve heard it said it was depravity at its worst. Historian Lawrence Foster, referring to Latter-day Saint history in plural marriage, stated, “Today, somewhat paradoxically, Mormons are among the most ‘traditional’ of any group in their attitudes toward family life and the role of women.”⁴⁷⁶ Couched in Mr. Foster’s bewilderment is the flaw in the critics’ logic about polygamy. If the history of Nauvoo and early Utah was one big orgy, **why are the Latter-day Saints some of the most chaste people on the planet?**

- If polygamy was rooted in sexual opportunism, shouldn't we be seeing those fruits today?
- If our heritage is based on sexual conquest, why are the men of the Church more devoted to their spouses and children than other religious and non-religious groups?
- Suppose I were to believe the narrative that critics relay regarding polygamy in Nauvoo and Utah. Why then are Latter-day Saints **more educated, have stronger families, have higher levels of fidelity, and have longer-lasting marriages?**

Polygamy was practiced for about two generations in the early church. Though the mob would have found a way to murder Joseph Smith eventually, polygamy likely accelerated his demise. Polygamy in Nauvoo was kept confidential as it was illegal in Illinois, and Emma Smith, on and off, approved and disapproved of the practice.⁴⁷⁷ Some men in Nauvoo, like John Bennett, took advantage of women, telling them that he had been sanctioned by God through the prophet to have sexual relations.⁴⁷⁸ Polygamist families in Utah experienced untold hardship, especially the women. Polygamy contributed to the hostilities between the settlers of Utah and the US government.⁴⁷⁹ For these reasons and more, it is easy for critics to declare that “nothing good came of polygamy.”

Referring to the times when polygamy is acceptable, Jacob 2:30 declares, “For if I will, saith the Lord of Hosts, **raise up seed unto me**, I will command my people; otherwise they shall hearken unto these things.” (emphasis added)

Much can be said of the qualifier provided in Jacob 2:30, “Raise up seed unto me.” Does that mean more children? Or does it mean more children in faithful, believing homes? In early Utah, a case could be made for either or both. While polygamy does not increase the number of children per woman, it does increase the number of total children in society as more otherwise unmarried women are married.⁴⁸⁰ Also, in early Utah, the number of endowed women exceeded men by nearly 20%.⁴⁸¹ Undoubtedly, polygamy generated more children within the sealing covenant.

All plural marriages in early Utah required Church leader approval. Some men entered plural marriage because they were asked to do so by Church leaders.⁴⁸²

Participating in plural marriage would have required a high level of devotion to the gospel and faith in Jesus Christ. Religion would not have been a casual, once-a-week sort of thing. It would have been an every-moment, every-day lifestyle. It would have been an intense Abrahamic-like sacrifice.

“Loyalty to the practice of plural marriage led to huge sacrifices economically, socially, physically, and emotionally. Some members lost everything they had for the cause of plural marriage. In this way, the Lord forced a **deep-rooted shift in the hearts of His people so that nothing would ever again approach the sacredness reserved for family**. Just as Abraham was commanded to sacrifice Isaac to prove his loyalty, the Latter-day Saints were commanded to sacrifice everything to steel their devotion to their spouses and families. **Polygamy steeled the foundations of our theology.**” – Jonah Barnes (emphasis added, private interaction)

Around 20% of living church members descend from those who practiced polygamy, including much of our highest leadership.⁴⁸³

- **Is it possible to talk about all of the wonderful fruits of the Church without talking about plural marriage?**
- If I omit **Doctrine and Covenants 132**, don't I omit the beautiful doctrine of **eternal marriage and the sealing power**?
- Would the Church as we know it today have survived without those early saint's sacrifices?

Polygamy was an uncomfortable topic for me for many years. I am grateful that I do not live in those times when it was practiced. It is likewise uncomfortable for me to ignore the good fruits of polygamy as critics are apt to do. It is uncomfortable for me to ignore the sacrifices that some of my ancestors made to fortify the footing of the Church. **It is uncomfortable for me to ignore or mock our legacy of polygamy while enjoying all of its fruits.**

Other

Questions & Concerns

"By any standard, Mormonism is more ridiculous than any other religion" – BILL MAHER

"I finally had to admit it wasn't a good church, much less a true one." – User on
wasmormon.org⁴⁸⁴

Group Dynamics

After years of interacting with skeptics, I conclude that for critics, the actual sin of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is that we dare to group ourselves together. Random, scattered, isolated individuals pose no real threat to anyone. To our critics, it would be better if we were not a cohesive group.

- Aren't the Latter-day Saints able to do **more good** as a **group**? Don't we help more as a unit? Don't the youth benefit from being with other youth and adult mentors? Don't men and women benefit from being part of a group?
- Didn't the Missourians in Jackson County in the 1830s persecute the saints because they were a group? A group that could disrupt the status quo in Missouri? In a way, weren't the **extermination order Missourians** of the 1830s the **spiritual forebearers** of many of the **critics of the Church today**?

Every October and April, dozens of critics eagerly listen to general conference with the intent of providing new content for their audiences. I see them criticize virtually every speaker from every angle. It feels like **they prefer that we say nothing**. I think they wish we just kept our mouths shut and kept the TVs off that weekend. They especially shun principles related to covenants and standards.

- **Is it wrong to have a standard?** A goal? An aim? **Are we allowed to say anything**, or must we remain silent for fear of making someone, somewhere, feel bad?
- Would the critics prefer that our church was nothing more than a glorified self-help seminar mixed with Jesus?

Anytime there is a large group, it requires some institutional organization. Gallup reported historic lows in trust in US institutions in 2022 and 2023.⁴⁸⁵ **Distrusting institutions is trendy.**

*"I want to see the church do good, but I have so little trust in the organization."*⁴⁸⁶ – Reddit user

- Aren't critics being swept up in what is societally popular right now? Is their problem really with the Church, or do they have other influences, such as a general distrust of organizations, that inform their skepticism?

It's easy to see the **bias**. Look at the comments reacting to any clearly positive headline with the Church and see the **vitriol**.

\$44 Million donated to alleviate world hunger donated in 2023

- *"Is the old adage, 'You've got to spend money to make money' applicable here?"*⁴⁸⁷ – Reddit user

\$8.7 Million donated to the Red Cross in 2024

- *"That's literally pocket change for the multi-billion dollar church and is only donated for tax purposes if this is even true."*⁴⁸⁸ – Reddit user

Light the World charity vending machines (where the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints absorbed 100% of the operating costs)

- *"Brilliant and greedy marketing. They keep their 100's of billions in the bank, members (and some others) pay for the gifts and LDS inc get all the glory and another PR win."*⁴⁸⁹ – Reddit user
- *"Even if legit...Why doesn't the church encourage members to donate directly to these organizations? Why make people give it to them so they can then claim it as money they are donating? For a church claiming to be led by Jesus, they care more about the appearance of being charitable than the actual charity."*⁴⁹⁰ – Reddit user

Free ice cream for visitors at BYU football games

- I do not have the exact quote, but I recall vividly someone on X (Twitter) in the fall of 2023 who claimed that free ice cream for visitors at BYU Football games was a ploy to gain converts and thereby make more tithing money. The X (Twitter) user's math was something like, *"If they have a 1% conversion rate on 3000 visitors, that's 30 converts per game. If each convert pays \$10,000/year in tithing in perpetuity, then the Church gets a huge return on their investment."*

The truth is that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is **excellent at providing aid** and **helping for the right reasons** and with **little fanfare**. I'm sure the Church could be doing more in the same way that I could be doing more. I suspect that no matter who the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints helps and how much money is donated, there are a great many people who will sneer and make accusations. So, I stopped listening to them.

Masculinity

Toxic masculinity is a popular subject in the culture right now, as it should be. Abusive and domineering men should be stopped and taught.

- Is there a better program than the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints for **teaching boys** how to be **truly masculine**?
- Doesn't the Church do a great job of giving boys and men a **responsibility** and a role to play in society and in the Church? Aren't the Church's doctrines and teachings directing boys and men to **think of others** and **serve God**?
- Isn't the Church a great place for good men to mentor boys? Men who teach true masculinity? Aren't the boys of the Church less likely to become delinquent? Less likely to be destructive or "toxic"?

Are there other successful large organizations where men are taught as successfully by other men how to be a force for good in their families and in the world?

- Aren't **women the biggest beneficiary** of the Church's ability to create **good men**? Aren't so many problems in society tied to fatherlessness? Doesn't the gospel of Jesus Christ remedy the root cause of fatherlessness?

- If the world, like members of the Church, practiced the principles of chastity, charity, temperance, and patience, wouldn't we have fewer divorces and family abandonments?

Violence

On March 30th, 2024, a news story was published about a teenage boy from Gilbert, Arizona, who beat up another boy at a party. The victim died from his injuries. A critic of the Church of Jesus Christ posted online the original news article with the following (now deleted) caption:

"AZ hometown news: a group of wealthy Mormon teens bullied and beat a 16-year-old to death in Gilbert Arizona. The local Mormon community collaborated to protect the perpetrator and the Gilbert police refused to charge until national pressure made them."

I was upset that something like that could happen among our ranks. Having lived briefly in neighboring Queen Creek, Arizona, I was stunned that something like that could happen. Then I read the news article.⁴⁹¹ There was not one mention of the boy's religious affiliation, no indication of a conspiracy to cover up by local ward/stake members, and nothing about the Gilbert police delaying pressing charges. Nothing about the boy or the details surrounding the incident sounded remotely like the account was about a faithful Latter-day Saint teenage boy.

Sure enough, less than 24 hours later, to this critic's credit, they owned their mistake and admitted:

"None of the Gilbert Goons are Mormon. It is a rumor. There are a lot of Mormons in Gilbert. Some fool started the rumor that some of the goons are Mormon – and I foolishly boosted that baseless rumor." (emphasis added)

- Why do false stories like the one above and many similar ones get so much attention?

There are countless examples of critics desperately trying to find systematic violence among the Latter-day Saints. Why are critics so eager to do so?

Critics cannot accept or desperately try to cover up the reality that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints **helps bad people become good and good people become better**. Critics grab onto **anything that allows them to believe that the Church is bad**. In truth, every lesson, sacrament sermon, and general conference talk points Latter-day Saints to the Savior. Every devotional, fireside, and ordinance is intended to inspire the listener to improve themselves, their homes, their communities, and the world.

- Why would I listen to critics who promote false narratives if I'm trying to find more light and truth?

Unfortunately, we live in a fallen world, and some bad people are out there. Sometimes, those people are members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. However, common sense and evidence indicate that the bad people in the Church are bad in **spite** of the Church's teachings, not **because** of it.

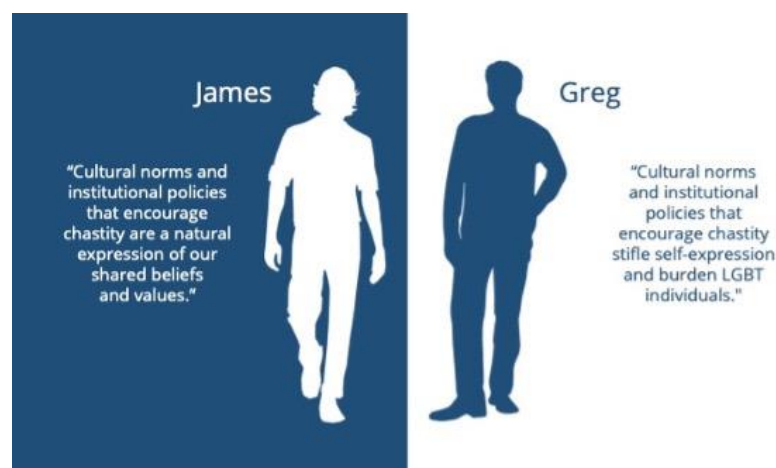
Worldview

For years, I wondered how people who were part of the same church and listening to the same messages could have radically different interpretations.

BYU-Idaho professor of Psychology Jeffery Thayne gave a [FAIR Latter-day Saint conference speech in 2021](#)⁴⁹² titled “Worldview Apologetics: Revealing the Waters in Which We Swim.” So much of what I see in the Church and from detractors of the Church finally made sense to me when I saw and pondered the message of the video of this speech. To watch the original video, see it below:



Thayne gives a hypothetical example of two members of the Church, “James” and “Greg.”⁴⁹³ Both declare that the 1995 “The Family: A Proclamation to the World” is doctrinal. James believes that cultural norms and policies that encourage chastity are natural expressions of the proclamation on the family. Greg believes those same norms and policies regarding chastity stifle self-expression and burden LGBT-identified individuals.



How? How can two members of the same Church who believe the same document is doctrinal come to different conclusions?

It all comes down to **worldview**. Jeffrey says, “**A worldview is a set of values and assumptions about the world**, through which we interpret our experiences. More specifically, **worldviews shape our understanding** of what human flourishing and the good life look like.” (emphasis added) The story we tell ourselves informs how we see the world, or rather, it is the waters we swim in.

Thayne then goes on to explain the two prominent worldviews (out of many) that influence members of the Church: The “Gospel Worldview/Story” and the “Expressive Individualist Worldview/Story.” Both worldviews have a (1) central problem/conflict, (2) character aspirations/desires, (3) expected/anticipated resolution, (4) definition of human flourishing/the good life, and (5) villains/antagonists.

The Gospel Worldview / Story

Character's aspirations / desires

Salvation and exaltation, return to live with God

The central problem / conflict

Alienation from God through sin and rebellion

The expected / anticipated resolution

Redemption thru Christ by making & keeping sacred covenants

Human flourishing / the good life

Fruits and gifts of the Spirit & temple worship

Villains / antagonists

Sin, vice, and the Adversary

The Expressive Individualist Worldview / Story

Character's aspirations / desires

To become our truest selves, to live authentically

The central problem / conflict

Judgment & evaluation from others leads us to live falsely

The expected / anticipated resolution

Break free of stifling norms and expectations

Human flourishing / the good life

Living in communities that celebrate our uniquenesses

Villains / antagonists

Norms that make us feel judged and evaluated

The two visuals presented by Thayne helped me completely change the way I see the world. They give me compassion for those who oppose the Church. Depending on how I define the villain of the worldview/story, I could easily have become hostile to the Church as well. Depending on our worldview, here is how “the story” plays out.



In my mind, the **gospel story is much more compelling**. I see **more positive fruits** from the gospel story than the widespread expressive individualist story in the culture. People today are more depressed,⁴⁹⁴ lonelier,⁴⁹⁵ and less religious⁴⁹⁶ than ever. I believe that a restoration to Christ as the central hero of our story is the only way to true societal healing.

- Wouldn't a worldview that focuses more on the gratification of my immediate wants hurt my family and community? Wouldn't focusing on short-term, immediate pleasures make me less happy in the long run?
- Wouldn't my family and I be much better off with the gospel story?

I can imagine how miserable I would be if I only sought relationships with people who had no expectations of me. A shallow life where I cut out of my life everyone else who does not affirm me because they are “toxic.” I can imagine it because those are the cultural waters we swim in. Get me out of the pool, please.

Summary of Critical Myths

Over time, I have realized that some former members of the Church who criticize it are **extremely uncurious**. They ask one question and then have no interest in the answer. They spend less time answering their challenging gospel concerns than watching their favorite Netflix show.

For the other, more thoughtful critics, I have some concerns.

Members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints desire truth. **Our Church started** with a **sincere question asked in prayer**. Members are compassionate and caring. When I started my faith journey, I took the critics' arguments against the Church at face value. I assumed those ideas were being presented in good faith. Over time, I've learned that this is not true. **Critics tried exploiting** my desire for light and my openness to truth. They **took advantage of my empathy** and tried convincing me that the Church was harming people when the opposite was true.

Throughout this letter, I've identified several false concepts that critics of the Church insinuate are factual. In summary, here are the false premises, presuppositions, and myths that critics readily claim to be realities.

Leader Infallibility

Many critical arguments against the Church start with the presupposition that our leaders are or should be infallible. That was curious to me. Why would someone who has left the Church claim infallibility for church leaders? Then it hit me. If a critic of the Church **can get me to accept the false premise** that Church leaders are **infallible** and then show me an instance where they errored, well, **that is “game over.”**

“When a prophet speaketh in the name of the Lord, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord hath not spoken, but the prophet hath spoken it **presumptuously.**” – [Deuteronomy 18:22](#) (emphasis added)

There seems to be a biblical understanding that prophets sometimes speak presumptuously. Once I accepted that men and women called by God are still subject to **human error** and mistaken judgment, **I answered nearly all of my gospel questions.** While floundering toward truth and the divine, **flawed people can still be God’s chosen servants.** All of the evidence from the scriptures suggests that God is perfectly comfortable calling imperfect people to His work.

Some former members sincerely believed that church leaders should be infallible when they were active members of the faith. I feel for them. Growing up and finding out that adults are imperfect is a challenging phase. I hope that the awkward reality that **God calls flawed people to do His work** can someday be a **faith-promoting idea** for those disenfranchised former or current members.

The Great Sin of Gathering

By becoming an identifiable group, we automatically put a target on our institutional “back.” Groups are naturally a threat. Random, scattered, and isolated people are no threat (nor much benefit) to anyone. The “identifiable group” frustration for critics is compounded by the [Church’s mission](#) to “help all of God’s children come to Jesus Christ through learning about His gospel, making and keeping promises with God (covenants), and practicing Christlike love and service.”⁴⁹⁷ Whenever any member, parent, or leader fails to live up to this stated mission, many critics treat this as if the Church is failing. **For some critics, no amount of good can compensate** for the **personal and one-off negative experiences** they had or heard of with the church.

But the **critics are wrong.** It is **good for us to come together.** To learn from one another. Sure, people say annoying and insensitive things in my ward. But getting together is **worth the risk.** It’s worth listening to the occasional cringy testimony or nonsensical comments in Sunday school to have a community and a family. It’s okay and good even to have immediate and extended family members who drive me crazy but love me and my kids. **I**

desperately need family members and ward members, not social media groups. I do not want endless therapy sessions with counselors who charge per hour to be my friend. I need people in my life who will always be there and where some effort is required to maintain the relationship.

If not, I would perpetually push “toxic” people out of my life until all that is left is myself.

Dare to Have a Standard

In conjunction with the sin of gathering together, what bothers some critics more than anything else is that we dare to have a standard or ideal. The Church of Jesus Christ has doctrinal and cultural standards, and **critics eagerly wait for the Church to mess up.** Some critics relish it when one of our members is guilty of impropriety or crime. **No one would care if a Kohl’s department store member committed a heinous act.** But if that same person is a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, it is headline news. This is **hypocritical and wrong.** Standards have brought me the most precious blessings of my life. Was it hard at times to strive for a high standard? Sure. Because of high standards, do some fall short and then feel guilty? Sure. Does that mean we throw it all out the window? Absolutely not. That is asinine.

Our churches typically have a sign that says, **“Visitors welcome,”** and our temples have one that says, **“Holiness to the Lord.”** We want all to come and worship with us weekly in our chapels, regardless of where they are. On the other hand, the Lord’s house (the temple) has a standard of worthiness. I’ve seen only blessings for **chapel worshippers who strive to be temple worshippers.** I once knew a woman in a previous ward who came weekly to church, sometimes with her wife. She could not participate in the full range of opportunities at church, but the ward loved having her and her partner with us. Years later, after I moved out of that ward, my wife saw her inside the temple. I do not know the whole story; I’m sure temple worship came at a great cost. But she must have rediscovered that special something in temple worship that brings me back to the house of the Lord over and over.

Critical Myths

When I peruse Ex-Mormon Reddit boards, X (Twitter) feeds, or any other social media site today, a pattern of myths showcases itself. With some critical thinking, it became easier to identify fair criticism from misinformation.

Myth	Critical thinking
"There is no archeological evidence for the Book of Mormon."	There is plenty of evidence . Frankincense trail, Nahom, Mulek, Bountiful, Mesoamerica and/or Heartland evidence, Semitic language parallels in the Americas, etc.
"There is no DNA evidence for the Book of Mormon."	Not relevant. Genuine critics acknowledge the limitations of DNA evidence .
"Waiting to have sex until you are married is stupid."	It's not stupid if you want a longer-lasting, happier relationship .
"Getting married young is a bad idea and leads to ruined families."	That is not true on the whole. Perhaps it's true for some former members. Growing together with your spouse while young is beautiful and creates more interconnectedness for stronger, longer-lasting marriages.
"The Church hurts families."	In a fallen world, sometimes families get hurt. The Church can help.
"The Church makes you depressed."	Not true. Overwhelming evidence shows that religiosity fortifies against mental health issues .
"Utah has a higher-than-average anti-depressant usage because of the Church's toxic perfectionism culture."	The antidepressant usage part is correct, but the "why" is not. The "why" is unclear, but in all other regards, members of the Church are happy and healthy.
"Utah is 16th in the nation in suicide because of the Church's hostility toward the LGBTQ+ community."	The first part is correct, but the "why" is false. The Church is likely preventing what would be a worse outcome for Utah. There are a variety of factors that explain Utah's suicide rate, including elevation, rurality, gun laws, and the happiness paradox.
"Joseph Smith was a fraud."	Where is your evidence beyond you do not like him?
"The Church is a greedy corporation."	Not true. What individuals would be enriched by the Church's money if this was true?
"If you identify as LGBTQ+, your family will abandon you."	This is pure manipulation. I'm sure some families have not reacted well, and I'm sorry that is the case. But to state this as a fact is wrong.
"If you identify as LGBTQ+, the Church will hate you."	Nonsense. Why do LGBTQ+-identifying members of the Church do as well, if not better , than their non-religious peers in areas of mental health?
"Church leaders purposely misled their members until the internet came out, and they couldn't do it anymore."	Maybe a half-truth at best . Not all parts of church history have been emphasized all of the time. On the other hand, the Church of Jesus Christ is focused on the work of salvation. Spending weeks every year debunking critics regarding church history would be a waste of time. The church curriculum gives a high-level overview and moves on to the next topic. "Joseph Smith translated the Book of Mormon by the gift and power of God" is the most accurate and concise way of describing what happened. How helpful would it be to scrutinize the various witnesses' accounts and figure out when he used the Urim and Thummim vs. the seer stone? Did he even use a seer stone at all? We could spend weeks addressing and answering those questions or say, "By the gift and power of God," and get back to talking about serving our neighbors. The Church liberally provides plenty of resources to anyone who wants to know more about church history.

Myth	Critical thinking
"Joseph Smith wrote the Book of Mormon because he is a religious genius, not a prophet."	Are critics moving the goalposts ? Was Joseph Smith an idiot or a religious genius? The truth is that critics have no idea where the Book of Mormon came from.
"The Church is systematically abusive."	Not true. The Church has unique policies and practices that prevent and report abuse. Instances of abuse in the Boy Scout program were far less likely to happen in LDS troops than in others.
"The Church seeks to cover up abuse and then harm victims of abuse."	Not true. I'm sure there is probably an anecdotal example of local church leaders not doing enough or making the problem worse. That does not make the problem widespread.
"Joseph Smith could have easily made up the Book of Mormon."	Not remotely true. Name one example of a 19th-century writer with little formal education and no book writing or dictation experience writing a complicated, consistent, and profound, nearly 270,000-word book in 60-90 days in one draft with relatively few revisions.
"At 23 years old, Joseph Smith knew the Bible really well and was a great storyteller."	Where is the evidence?
"The source for the Book of Mormon was ..."	Every claim for the source of the Book of Mormon falls dramatically short . All of the source claims are theories with no proof. Most of the books referenced (View of the Hebrews, The Late War, The 1st Book of Nepolean, the Spaulding Manuscript, etc.) are in the 50,000-word count range; where did the rest of the Book of Mormon come from?
"The Book of Mormon is clearly made up by a 19th-century author."	If you do not understand the environment in 600 BC after King Josiah or the mode of translation, then I see why you would think that.
"The Book of Mormon has so many anachronisms it can't be true."	Out of 205 anachronisms claimed by critics, all but 19% have been eliminated or are trending that way. In the messy field of archeology, especially in the Americas, that's remarkable. If the Book of Mormon was made up off the top of Joseph Smith's head, then shouldn't it prove more ludicrous over time? Why is the Book of Mormon instead proving more plausible over time?
"The Hebraisms in the Book of Mormon are coincidental."	Hundreds of instances of Hebraisms are by chance? What are the odds of that? The chiasmus in Alma 36 alone is proof it was not by chance.
" The witnesses of the Book of Mormon are just a bunch of Joseph Smith's wacky, fanatic friends and family. "	Then why did all of the witnesses continue to affirm their testimony of the Book of Mormon even after they left the Church? Why did none of them recant their testimony?
" Members of the Church pretend that they are happy because they are pressured to."	Evidence?
"The Church is damaging for your mental health."	Despite study after study showing the opposite is true?
"Church members only give money to the Church; they don't care about other causes."	Not true. After tithing and church callings, church members still donate as much, if not more, time and money to outside causes.

Myth	Critical thinking
"Church members only live longer because of the word of wisdom."	Then why have researchers found that even controlling for tobacco usage , members still live longer? Why do studies consistently point to religious people living healthier, longer lives ?
"The Church is oppressive to women."	Women are some of the greatest beneficiaries of the Church. Our men are less abusive and less likely to commit acts of sexual abuse. Our couples are far less likely to get divorced. Children are more likely to be raised in a two-parent home. Married women with children report higher levels of happiness and lower levels of unhappiness than any other group.
"Women are encouraged to suffer abuse."	What?
"You don't need a church to be a good person."	True. But it is also true that the Church brings out the best in people , and it shows: more volunteering, more charity, more involvement in the community, better relationships with neighbors, etc.
"The Church's obsession with family history is weird and useless."	The opposite of true. Family history has major psychological benefits, especially for adolescents.
"Joseph Smith plagiarized the Freemason ceremony in the temple endowment."	Then why are elements of the temple ceremony found in the 20 years leading up to 1842? Why does the temple ceremony share elements from early Christian rituals? How did Joseph Smith recover lost temple elements from before the Josiah reforms?
"Getting a testimony from the Holy Ghost is unreliable."	Potentially true. We can conflate the Holy Ghost with our feelings. Does that mean God does not speak to us? Can we not get better at identifying answers to prayers?
"Spiritual testimonies are the result of neurological triggers."	Hogwash. Perhaps some spiritual experiences in some instances can be explained this way, but certainly not all.
"The Church claims to have a lay ministry, but the general authorities get paid."	99% of church leaders are unpaid. 100 or so church leaders out of our 17-million-member church receive a modest salary.
"Church leaders should be infallible or at least the best among us."	They are not infallible, nor have we ever taught that they are. Judging past leaders based on today's standards is immature and unwise.
"The Church promotes toxic masculinity."	This is not remotely true. The Church is one of the best places for young men to learn how to be kind and serve from good men.
"The Church encourages abuse."	Pardon?
"Church members are violent."	Nope. Some percentage of the population is violent, and some of those people are members of our church. Any violence perpetrated by members of our church is in spite of, not because of , the Church's teaching, policies, and practices.

Myth	Critical thinking
"Members of the Church are dishonest. They lie for the Lord."	Not true. Latter-day Saints are widely seen as honest people and good neighbors. People can tell that our communities have less crime and delinquency. To enter our highest and holiest places (the temple), members of the Church are required to answer in the affirmative, "Do you strive to be honest in all that you do?"
"Church leaders lied about Joseph Smith's seer stones."	Not quite. Part of the problem is canonization . Once Joseph Smith canonized his story in Joseph Smith - History and included details about the Urim and Thummim but not the seer stone(s), it was only a matter of time before those details became forgotten naturally with time. Joseph Smith's seer stones were held in high regard and reverence among the saints before and after the prophet's death. Scholars still debate whether Joseph Smith used the seer stone(s) during the Book of Mormon translation. We cannot know whether he used them later in the translation process or if he used them as a demonstration for curious parties without showing them the Urim and Thummim.
"Joseph Smith made up the first vision later in life and embellished details as he went."	Wrong. The various first vision accounts were given at different times to different people in different contexts, which accounts for some variations, but the overall thrust is consistent. Critics point to Joseph's first published account of the First Vision in 1832 as inconsistent with later versions as it references "the Lord" (instead of two personages). LDS historians Don Bradley and Walker Wright ⁴⁹⁸ point out that Joseph Smith was working on translating the Bible during this same period. Joseph Smith curiously changed John 1:18 from " No man hath seen God at any time ; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him." to "And no man hath seen God at any time, except he hath borne record of the Son ; for except it is through him no man can be saved." This translation echoes Joseph Smith's 1 st vision.

The uncomfortable truth for believing members is that critics raise some valid concerns against the Church of Jesus Christ and its truth claims. To this day, **I do not have all of the answers**. On the other hand, critics do use angled and ugly narratives to distort the facts. **Anything can sound evil when the least flattering versions of events are shared with ominous-sounding music playing in the background**. Opponents of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints appear all too willing to make targeted arguments at the expense of the evidence and the overall narrative.

Most critical narratives **make no sense** when I follow them to their **logical conclusion**. If a bunch of sexual deviants founded the Church, how come we don't see the fruits of that today? Why are Latter-day Saint families and marriages stronger? Why do Latter-day Saints hold a high sexual standard for men and women? Why do Church leaders marry and stay married to the same spouse their whole lives? If Joseph Smith created the Church to satisfy his need for power and dominion, how come we don't see the fruits of that today? Why do Church leaders dedicate their whole lives to the gospel of Jesus Christ to then get called in their golden years as general authorities? If treasure digging is the legacy of the Church,

how come we don't see the fruits of that today? Is the Church abusive, and does it breed violence? Where are the fruits of that narrative anywhere?

→ **If I believed the stories about the Church from critics, why do we not see what we would expect based on their narratives?**

To make their ideas work, **critics must ignore mounds of evidence**. They must **constantly adapt and adjust as their theories** fall out of favor. Critics ask me to leave the depths of truth of the restored gospel to swim in the shallows of misinformation. They **ignore all the good that the Church does** in the world and **pretend it is somehow wrong or self-serving**. Critics are keen to blame the human condition on the Church, despite the Church improving the human condition by measurable standards. Skeptics must do impressive mental gymnastics to explain the Book of Mormon and other fruits of the restoration. Manipulation + fallacies + half-truths + false narratives + “they are the problem” + “we are the solution”? Sounds like an abusive boyfriend. As a **potential believer**, I had much more flexibility to have a **nuanced perspective**. Was the African ban potentially a racist policy? Could be. And I hate that that happened. Are the prophets and apostles still called of God? Yes.

“I can live with some human imperfections, even among prophets of God—that is to be expected in mortal beings. I can live with some alleged scientific findings contrary to the Book of Mormon; time will correct those. And I can live with some seeming historical anomalies; they are minor in the total landscape of truth. **But I cannot live without the doctrinal truths and ordinances** restored by Joseph Smith, I cannot live without the **priesthood of God** to bless my family, and I cannot live without knowing my wife and children are **sealed to me for eternity**. That is the choice we face—a few unanswered questions on one hand versus a host of doctrinal certainties and the power of God on the other.”⁴⁹⁹ (emphasis added) – TAD R. CALLISTER

Belief in God

“I’m an atheist after leaving the church and that road to atheism started on my mission. Tonight and many nights before this I’ve caught myself almost asking god for help. I’ve been out for over 20 years and the programming is still there.” – Reddit User, topic “I wish there was an omnipotent god.”⁵⁰⁰

“God knows where I am & I’ve sent an open invitation to knock on my door. So far, nothing. No response.” – Reddit User⁵⁰¹

As I wrap up this letter, I end with the question that started my faith journey: **Is there a God?**

During those first few months of my journey, I grappled with the **problem of evil**. How can a loving God allow bad things to happen to good people? Why did my father-in-law pass away when his children were living at home, and his wife desperately needed him? He was nothing but good. Did he deserve it? Did his family deserve it? Why does God help the rich American child find a lost toy after earnest prayer while a child in a war-torn country dies in a far-off land whose prayers are unanswered? Why does God allow vicious and brutal dictators to rule with an iron fist? What about the countless horrors enacted daily since the beginning of time?

Though I knew all of the primary answers to my questions, my answers fell flat this time. I remember feeling that a god who did nothing to help us was equivalent to no god at all.

Then something happened. In a completely unrelated setting, I heard **a phrase** that would **change my life forever**.

“Death is not the worst thing that can happen to us.”

This innocuous phrase, given by someone who did not know my internal struggle, single-handedly **opened the window to belief again in my agnostic heart**. I realized that I was treating this life as the end of all existence. I'm not sure how long I had internalized atheism, but it had been there for some time. With that atheistic mindset, if this life is all that there is, then truly, any amount of suffering and wrong is unjust. On the other hand, if this life is not the end of our story, then there has to be more to the story. If there is a loving God, but there is so much evil in the world, then it follows that He likely **gives us space to make our own choices**. Even if our choices harm others. If not, the malevolent dictators would never take power, and rapists would not exist. People would not neglect or harm one another.

In Alma 14, Alma and Amulek witness the death by fire of faithful women and children at the hands of bad people. Amulek begs Alma to use God's power to deliver the faithful and innocent women and children from death.

“But Alma said unto him: The Spirit constraineth me that I must not stretch forth mine hand; for behold **the Lord receiveth them up unto himself**, in glory; and he doth suffer that they may do this thing, or that the people may do this thing unto them, according to the hardness of their hearts, that the judgments which he shall exercise upon them in his wrath may be just; and the **blood of the innocent shall stand as a witness against them**, yea, and cry mightily against them at the last day.” (Emphasis added) – [Alma 14:11](#)

I did not believe all at once, but for the first time in a while, belief in God made sense. If mortality is a blip on the eternal timetable, then **our suffering here on earth would be but a small moment**. For God to be just and merciful, a reward must be given so that every man, woman, and child, no matter their toil on earth, would agree that it was all

worth it. Each person would have to **consent to experience this unjust mortal existence**, knowing that their anguish may be intolerable.

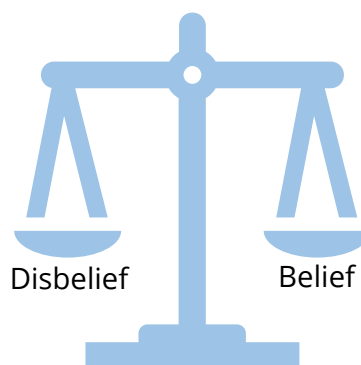
If there truly is a loving God, and this life is not the end, then somehow, the wrongs and injustices of mortality must be made right. But how can God make the problem of evil right? The answer hit me all at once as if I never knew - **Jesus Christ**. If an atoning Messiah would make all suffering, wrong, heartache, and even death right, then that would be **good news** indeed. If the gospel story is true, then **death is not the worst thing that can happen to us**.

Something became manifestly clear as I sorted these thoughts out in my mind. I was **recreating the story of the gospel of Jesus Christ taught in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints** from the ashes of my disbelief. Not only could I finally see how I could believe in God again, but I saw that the **restoration** provided the **best possible explanation** for how it all worked.

The Scale of Belief

Though I had sorted out how I could believe, that did not mean I did believe quite yet. That is when I started **exploring the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints with fresh eyes**. I spent countless hours reading and listening to critics and apologists alike. Learning church history from the faithful and critical narratives. Listening to the stories of members of the Church who left and former members who returned. I went down every rabbit hole I could find. I learned the good, bad, and ugly of previous church policies. **I asked countless hard questions and left myself completely open to light and truth**.

With time, I discovered something. **I could never prove that the Church of Jesus Christ is true or false**. Negatives lurked around the corner, no matter how much positive evidence I found. Likewise, when I learned some unflattering aspects of the restoration, a logical counter-explanation presented itself. Eventually, **my scale of belief vs. disbelief felt about 50/50**.



I realized **I had to make a decision. I had to believe in something.** Whether I believed or did not believe, **either was a leap of faith.** In due time, **I decided that I would believe.**

Giving up on the “I know” statements I was accustomed to in exchange for “**I believe” declarations** was incredibly **liberating.** The gospel that I knew so well **became new and exhilarating** to me. My scale has shifted over the years, but I have never regretted my decision to become a believing member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

I do not have every answer to every one of my questions. However, I can say this much with a degree of certainty: **something special happened between 1820 and 1845.** It was easy to come to that conclusion for all of the reasons listed in this letter and many more.

Most importantly, I have come to have a **personal relationship with God** that I cannot adequately understand. I am baffled that the God of the universe can communicate with me. In those quiet moments when I seek Him in prayer, and He responds, I am **awe-struck.** How can He, the God above all, listen to my cares and wants? How is it that He, the highest and holiest one, listens to me and answers my prayers? I do not know, but I am amazed that he does.

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.

- T.S. ELIOT (“Little Gidding,” *Four Quartets*, 1943)

Conclusion

“Though argument does not create conviction, the lack of it destroys belief. What seems to be proved may not be embraced; but what no one shows the ability to defend is quickly abandoned. **Rational argument does not create belief, but it maintains a climate in which belief may flourish.**”⁵⁰² (emphasis added) – AUSTIN FARRER

The evidence for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints' truth claims is not conclusive, but it is **compelling**. While I cannot prove that the Church is definitively true beyond a reasonable doubt, there is **great space for belief**. To pretend otherwise is disingenuous.

The first time I read the *CES Letter* and started listening to *Mormon Stories*, I felt convinced these were sincere former members of the Church raising genuine concerns. When I found out how much of what is on *Mormon Stories* and in the *CES Letter* is narrative manipulation and disinformation, I felt betrayed. Critics use a **series of falsehoods** and **misleading statements** that build in order to draw incorrect conclusions. I was in a vulnerable state of truth-seeking, and I could **feel the critics trying to take advantage of me**. Some critics act the part of neutral third-party truth seekers, and **I was stupid for long enough to believe them**. They completely deceived me and thousands of other questioning Latter-day Saints. How am I supposed to trust the critics anymore?

Jeremy Runnels cleverly disguises what the *CES Letter* truly is: a **collection of anti-Mormon arguments** delivered via **doubt bombing**. I'm sure Jeremy was earnest in his gospel questions at one point, but that man was long gone by the time the letter was published in April 2013.

When I tried to leave, **the Book of Mormon stumped me. It stumps the critics, too**. The malicious and sincere critics alike struggle to develop a compelling theory of how it came into existence. The best they can do is **mentally reconstruct** some **complicated** and **convoluted scenario** of how Joseph created the Book of Mormon. If I believed the critics, I would have to believe that Joseph Smith was a manipulative, horny con man that was **so bad at his con** that he built the **most Christ-centered church and people** in the latter days. Usually, the theory critics pose is more unbelievable than an angel giving golden plates to Joseph. No skeptic, after desperate attempts for 200 years, has ever given a model that explains the Book of Mormon in a convincing way.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is highly successful at generating stronger families, less divorce, longer lives, higher life satisfaction, healthier people, better outcomes for adolescents and young adults, less domestic abuse, less sexual violence, less juvenile delinquency, less depression, more community, less loneliness, more purpose, better outcomes for sexual minorities, and higher rates of reported happiness. Throw all that away, the critics insist. For what? Satisfy every immediate desire, damned be my wife, kids, community, and my future self? A nihilistic life without meaning? A life without hope? Without Christ? Is that what the critics suggest is the good life? Do they realize how ridiculous that sounds? **The critics want to take everything away from me and give me nothing in return**. No thanks. **That's a bad trade**.

When my faith journey started, **I was an easy target for critics**. I already did not believe in God, and I already experienced the pain of telling my wife I was leaving. All that the critics had to do was **show me that there was more light and truth** outside of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. And **they completely failed**. I had way more unanswered questions outside the Church than I do inside.

My remaining questions are now part of my faith with new and exciting insights unfolding every day. Being an active member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the best decision of my life. I feel close to God, I feel peace, and I have purpose.

The more I learned and understood complex historical issues, modern controversial policies, and God's plan for us, the more answers to **questions that once puzzled me became crystal clear**. I still do not have all the answers to my gospel questions, and that's okay. God has given me the space I need for belief. **And I believe.**

I was a boy and followed the trail,
Priesthood, mission, and wedding tale.

As a man, I sought more light and truth,
I looked everywhere for sources of proof.

The journey was painful and took some time,
There was a mountain of doubt I had to climb.

With surprise, I see how far I've come,
And I've ended back where I started from.

The Journey Back

Epilogue

A Letter to a Former Member of the Church of Jesus Christ

Dear,

As I publish the Light and Truth Letter, I want you to know that it was not written about you. I know you are not trying to destroy the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. I know you have a balanced perspective on how the Church helped you. After my own intensive research, I honestly do not blame anyone for not being completely convinced of the restoration's truth claims. The evidence is convincing to me, but it certainly isn't irrefutable. As you've decided what to believe, I know parts of this letter may be uncomfortable for you. That wasn't my intention. I also know that you were personally injured at the hands of insensitive church leaders, and I'm sorry that happened. I don't know why the gospel did not work for you. I wish it had.

The Kingdom of God rolls on, but let me say that we, as a church, miss you. We were better when you were with us. There is a you-sized hole among our ranks. Over the years, we have benefitted so much from your gifts and talents, and we miss them. Most of all, we and I miss you. We can always spend time together in other ways, but it won't be the same for me, and that's okay.

If returning to the fold is not in the cards, I very much hope you are happier outside the Church. If you do not believe in God, I sincerely desire that you find life, love, and purpose without the gospel. Regardless of our differences, you have all of my love and respect.

All the best,

Austin Fife

Additional Resources

Gospel Topics Essays - <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics-essays/essays?lang=eng>

LDS Truth Claims - www.youtube.com/@ldstruthclaims3793

- Brett McDonald spends over 29 hours in 20–50-minute clips reviewing the Church's truth claims. As an attorney he uses the same standard of proofs used in our legal system.

Latter-day Saint Q & A - <https://latterdaysaintsqa.com/> or <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCJgEls1xaRLC-np8xiwl1yA>

- Jeff Roundy answers critics' questions and covers positive evidence for the restoration's truth claims in 81 videos, each 15-60 minutes long.

Mormonr (B.H Roberts Foundation) – mormonr.org

- Database of the critical arguments against the Church and good answers. Mormonr is very fair to the critic's ideas, does not shy away from the tough issues, and provides great sources.

FAIR Latter-day Saints - <https://www.fairlatterdaysaints.org/> or <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCoLAowawEfrtrxvNQQAx2yw>

- The traditional, non-Church affiliated apologetics organization. The landing spot for most scholarly defenses of the gospel.

Interpreter Foundation - <https://interpreterfoundation.org/>

- “Supporting the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints through scholarship.”

Evidence Central – evidencecentral.org

- Catalog of the positive evidence for the truth claims of the Church.

Saints Unscripted - <https://saintsunscripted.com/> or https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC2LBmYIOq6Eu_ZC14i_Yklg

- Variety of videos and other content oriented toward a younger audience. Tons of bite-size videos explaining controversial issues.

Ward Radio - <https://www.wardradio.com/> or <https://www.youtube.com/@WARDRADIO>

- Comedy. LDS news, radio, and podcast community. Debunkings, reactions, and current events.

The Stick of Joseph - <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCJJ4TYPZCKbZonuWVpA5XLg>

- The Paul brothers explore all things Book of Mormon.

CES Letter Debunkings

- Sarah Allen's <https://debunking-cesletter.com/>
- Jim Bennett's [A CES Letter Reply: Faithful Answers For Those Who Doubt](#)
- Michael Ash's [Bamboozled by the “CES Letter”](#)
- <http://www.cesletters.org>
- Greg Smith YouTube video - https://youtu.be/b0RaPLJY1cg?si=_z_YtRbB-v8nIRs3

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